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TEN
SELECTED ONE-ACT
PLAYS



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PLAYS

CHOSEN BY
MAX H. FULLER M.A.



GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.
LONDON TORONTO BOMBAY SYDNEY

First published January 1944
by GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD
182 High Holborn, London, W.C.1

Reprinted June 1945

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COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH THE
AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN. PRINTED AT THE LITMAN PRESS, BATH

FOREWORD

DURING the last twenty years the amateur dramatic movement, with the aid of the Drama Leagues in England and Scotland, has just managed to keep the serious drama alive in the professional theatre, but far greater co-ordination is necessary if it is to hold its own and flourish in the post-war world. The vast network of dramatic societies sprawling over the country must be given a direct lead by a central authority, so that the high standard of production reached by some schools and private organizations may be aimed at by every society. In other words, drama must be recognized as a necessary part of our national life.

It was significant to note that Sir Stafford Cripps, on his return from Russia, told us that even whilst the Nazis were hammering at the very gates of Moscow it was considered vital to maintain drama and music, in spite of all the other great sacrifices that the Russian people had to make, and are still making.

Perhaps we are learning, too, that drama is an essential part of the mosaic of life, for the State has taken over the Theatre Royal, Bristol, and local authorities have appointed several County Organizers of Drama, whose duty it is to develop dramatic work with Youth Clubs and Societies within the scope of the Service of Youth as defined by the Board of Education. That, at least, is a beginning, and in the meantime we owe a great debt to those actors who have kept the torch of drama alight during these dark days—men like John Gielgud, Martin Browne, Donald Wolfit, Robert Atkins, and Emlyn Williams.

Of the plays in this collection, eight are published for the

first time, while the other two, *The Ugly Duckling* and "*Wanted—Mr Stuart*," have appeared since the war.

One thing may seem odd: no war play is included. Several were read, but—well, perhaps it is that the war has been brought home to us this time, and that we want to "escape"; or—what seems much more likely—most playwrights feel that the war itself is drama enough, and that any attempt to dramatize it would create an artificial and exaggerated atmosphere. We are not as a nation given to boasting. Civilians, besides those in the Forces, have become heroes or heroines, but have no desire to see the fact blazoned abroad. It is just part of the day's work and is kept in its right perspective—and, after all, a sense of perspective is but a sense of humour. We prefer to look back and smile, rather than talk about it. Little wonder we do not take too kindly to war plays. The epic of Dunkirk called forth only a prose account from our Poet Laureate, John Masfield, in *Nine Days' Wonder*, but the magnificent story is all the more dramatic for this simple treatment.

One of the greatest war plays of all time—*Journey's End*—did not appear till some years after the last war, so there is plenty of time. Perhaps, in 1950 or 1960, we shall like to look back on these grim and dramatic days—days which some playwright will be able to see more clearly when all the events have fallen into the background.

M. H. F.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE compiler desires to express his thanks to Mr Harold Brighouse, to the Director of the Children's Hour, B.B.C., to the British Drama League, and to the Scottish Community Drama Association for their help and suggestions ; and to the following authors and publishers for the permission given to print the plays in this volume :

The author and Messrs Samuel French Ltd., for "*Wanted—Mr Stuart*"; the author and the University of London Press Ltd., for *The Real St George* ; the authors, for *The Age of Leisure*, *The Heroic Mould*, *The Queen and Mr Shakespeare*, *The Sage of Chelsea*, and *The Shirt* ; the authors and the Dramatists' Play Service, Inc., New York, for *The Doctor from Dunmore* ; the authors and Messrs Curtis Brown Ltd., for *Monks and a Mummer* and *The Ugly Duckling*.

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THE UGLY DUCKLING

by

A. A. Milne

CHARACTERS

THE KING
THE QUEEN
THE PRINCESS CAMILLA
THE CHANCELLOR
DULCIBELLA
PRINCE SIMON
CARLO

A. A. MILNE has delighted thousands of children between the ages of seven and seventy with his stories, poems, and plays. His profound understanding of character which warms our hearts towards Christopher Robin, Pooh, Kanga, Eeyore, Tigger, and the rest ; his Puckish humour flitting hither and thither like motes in a sunbeam ; his delicacy of touch like " vernal showers on the twinkling grass "—all are blended together with great artistry.

The Ugly Duckling will be a source of delight for many a day to come—to producers, actors, and audiences alike.

THE UGLY DUCKLING¹

SCENE is the Throne Room of the Palace ; a room of many doors, or, if preferred, curtain-openings ; simply furnished with three thrones for their Majesties and her Royal Highness the PRINCESS CAMILLA—in other words, with three handsome chairs. At each side is a long seat, reserved, as it might be, for his Majesty's Council (if any), but useful, as to-day, for other purposes. The KING is asleep on his throne with a handkerchief over his face. He is a king of any country from any story-book, in whatever costume you please. But he should be wearing his crown.

A VOICE [announcing]. His Excellency the Chancellor !

[The CHANCELLOR, an elderly man in horn-rimmed spectacles, enters, bowing. The KING wakes up with a start and removes the handkerchief from his face.]

KING [with simple dignity]. I was thinking.

CHANCELLOR [bowing]. Never, your Majesty, was greater need for thought than now.

KING. That's what I was thinking. [He struggles into a more dignified position.] Well, what is it ? More trouble ?

CHANCELLOR. What we might call the old trouble, your Majesty.

KING. It's what I was saying last night to the Queen. "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," was how I put it.

CHANCELLOR. A profound and original thought, which may well go down to posterity.

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

KING. You mean it may go down well with posterity. I hope so. Remind me to tell you some time of another little thing I said to her Majesty : something about a fierce light beating on a throne. Posterity would like that, too. Well, what is it ?

CHANCELLOR. It is in the matter of her Royal Highness' wedding.

KING. Oh . . . yes.

CHANCELLOR. As your Majesty is aware, the young Prince Simon arrives to-day to seek her Royal Highness' hand in marriage. He has been travelling in distant lands and, as I understand, has not—er—has not—

KING. You mean he hasn't heard anything.

CHANCELLOR. It is a little difficult to put this tactfully, your Majesty.

KING. Do your best, and I will tell you afterwards how you got on.

CHANCELLOR. Let me put it this way. The Prince Simon will naturally assume that her Royal Highness has the customary—so customary as to be, in my own poor opinion, slightly monotonous—has what one might call the inevitable—so inevitable as to be, in my opinion again, almost mechanical—will assume that she has the, as I think of it, faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly—

KING. What you are trying to say in the fewest words possible is that my daughter is not beautiful.

CHANCELLOR. Her beauty is certainly elusive, your Majesty.

KING. It is. It has eluded you, it has eluded me, it has eluded everybody who has seen her. It even eluded the Court Painter. His last words were, " Well, I did my best." His successor is now painting the view across the water-meadows from the West Turret. He says that his doctor has advised him to keep to landscape.

CHANCELLOR. It is unfortunate, your Majesty, but there it is. One just cannot understand how it can have occurred.

KING. You don't think she takes after *me*, at all? You don't detect a likeness?

CHANCELLOR. Most certainly not, your Majesty.

KING. Good. . . . Your predecessor did.

CHANCELLOR. I have often wondered what happened to my predecessor.

KING. Well, now you know. [*There is a short silence.*]

CHANCELLOR. Looking at the bright side, although her Royal Highness is not, strictly speaking, beautiful—

KING. Not, truthfully speaking, beautiful—

CHANCELLOR. Yet she has great beauty of character.

KING. My dear Chancellor, we are not considering her Royal Highness' character, but her chances of getting married. You observe that there is a distinction.

CHANCELLOR. Yes, your Majesty.

KING. Look at it from the suitor's point of view. If a girl is beautiful, it is easy to assume that she has, tucked away inside her, an equally beautiful character. But it is impossible to assume that an unattractive girl, however elevated in character, has, tucked away inside her, an equally beautiful face. That is, so to speak, not where you want it—tucked away.

CHANCELLOR. Quite so, your Majesty.

KING. This doesn't, of course, alter the fact that the Princess Camilla is quite the nicest person in the Kingdom.

CHANCELLOR [*enthusiastically*]. She is indeed, your Majesty. [*Hurriedly*] With the exception, I need hardly say, of your Majesty—and her Majesty.

KING. Your exceptions are tolerated for their loyalty and condemned for their extreme fatuity.

CHANCELLOR. Thank you, your Majesty.

KING. As an adjective for your King, the word "nice" is ill-chosen. As an adjective for her Majesty, it is—ill-chosen.

[*At which moment HER MAJESTY comes in. The KING rises.*

The CHANCELLOR puts himself at right angles.

QUEEN [*briskly*]. Ah. Talking about Camilla?

[*She sits down.*

KING [*returning to his throne*]. As always, my dear, you are right.

QUEEN [*to the CHANCELLOR*]. This fellow, Simon—
What's he like?

CHANCELLOR. Nobody has seen him, your Majesty.

QUEEN. How old is he?

CHANCELLOR. Five-and-twenty, I understand.

QUEEN. In twenty-five years he must have been seen by somebody.

KING [*to the CHANCELLOR*]. Just a fleeting glimpse.

CHANCELLOR. I meant, your Majesty, that no detailed report of him has reached this country, save that he has the usual personal advantages and qualities expected of a prince, and has been travelling in distant and dangerous lands.

QUEEN. Ah! Nothing gone wrong with his eyes? Sun-stroke or anything?

CHANCELLOR. Not that I am aware of, your Majesty. At the same time, as I was venturing to say to his Majesty, her Royal Highness' character and disposition are so outstandingly—

QUEEN. Stuff and nonsense. You remember what happened when we had the Tournament of Love last year.

CHANCELLOR. I was not myself present, your Majesty. I had not then the honour of—I was abroad, and never heard the full story.

QUEEN. No; it was the other fool. They all rode up to Camilla to pay their homage—it was the first time they had

seen her. The heralds blew their trumpets, and announced that she would marry whichever prince was left master of the field when all but one had been unhorsed. The trumpets were blown again, they charged enthusiastically into the fight, and——

[*The KING looks nonchalantly at the ceiling and whistles a few bars.*]

—don't do that.

KING. I'm sorry, my dear.

QUEEN [*to the CHANCELLOR*]. And what happened? They all simultaneously fell off their horses and assumed a posture of defeat.

KING. One of them was not quite so quick as the others. I was very quick. I proclaimed him the victor.

QUEEN. At the Feast of Betrothal held that night——

KING. We were all very quick.

QUEEN. The Chancellor announced that by the laws of the country the successful suitor had to pass a further test. He had to give the correct answer to a riddle.

CHANCELLOR. Such undoubtedly is the fact, your Majesty.

KING. There are times for announcing facts, and times for looking at things in a broadminded way. Please remember that, Chancellor.

CHANCELLOR. Yes, your Majesty.

QUEEN. I invented the riddle myself. Quite an easy one. What is it which has four legs and barks like a dog? The answer is, "A dog."

KING [*to the CHANCELLOR*]. You see that?

CHANCELLOR. Yes, your Majesty.

KING. It isn't difficult.

QUEEN. He, however, seemed to find it so. He said an eagle. Then he said a serpent; a very high mountain with

slippery sides ; two peacocks ; a moonlight night ; the day after to-morrow——

KING. Nobody could accuse him of not trying.

QUEEN. I did.

KING. I *should* have said that nobody could fail to recognize in his attitude an appearance of doggedness

QUEEN. Finally he said "Death." I nudged the King——

KING. Accepting the word "nudge" for the moment, I rubbed my ankle with one hand, clapped him on the shoulder with the other, and congratulated him on the correct answer. He disappeared under the table, and, personally, I never saw him again.

QUEEN. His body was found in the moat next morning.

CHANCELLOR. But what was he doing in the moat, your Majesty ?

KING. Bobbing about. Try not to ask needless questions.

CHANCELLOR. It all seems so strange.

QUEEN. What does ?

CHANCELLOR. That her Royal Highness, alone of all the princesses one has ever heard of, should lack that invariable attribute of royalty, supreme beauty.

QUEEN [*to the KING*]. That was your Great-Aunt Malkin. She came to the christening. You know what she said.

KING. It was cryptic. Great-Aunt Malkin's besetting weakness. She came to *my* christening—she was one hundred and one then, and that was fifty-one years ago. [*To the CHANCELLOR*] How old would that make her ?

CHANCELLOR. One hundred and fifty-two, your Majesty.

KING [*after thought*]. About that, yes. She promised me that when I grew up I should have all the happiness which my wife deserved. It struck me at the time—well, when I say "at the time," I was only a week old—but it did strike me as soon as anything could strike me—I mean of that

nature—well, work it out for yourself, Chancellor. It opens up a most interesting field of speculation. Though naturally I have not liked to go into it at all deeply with her Majesty.

QUEEN. I never heard anything less cryptic. She was wishing you extreme happiness.

KING. I don't think she was *wishing* me anything. However.

CHANCELLOR [*to the QUEEN*]. But what, your Majesty, did she wish her Royal Highness?

QUEEN. Her other godmother—on my side—had promised her the dazzling beauty for which all the women in my family are famous——

[*She pauses, and the KING snaps his fingers surreptitiously in the direction of the CHANCELLOR.*]

CHANCELLOR [*hurriedly*]. Indeed, yes, your Majesty.

[*The KING relaxes.*]

QUEEN. And Great-Aunt Malkin said—[*to the KING*]—what were the words?

KING.

I give you with this kiss

A wedding-day surprise.

Where ignorance is bliss

'Tis folly to be wise.

I thought the last two lines rather neat. But what it meant——

QUEEN. We can all see what it meant. She was given beauty—and where is it? Great-Aunt Malkin took it away from her. The wedding-day surprise is that there will never be a wedding-day.

KING. Young men being what they are, my dear, it would be much more surprising if there *were* a wedding-day. So how——

[*The PRINCESS comes in. She is young, happy, healthy, but not beautiful. Or let us say that by some trick of*

*make-up or arrangement of hair she seems plain to us :
unlike the Princess of the story-books.*

PRINCESS [*to the KING*]. Hallo, darling ! [*Seeing the others*]
Oh, I say ! Affairs of state ? Sorry.

KING [*holding out his hand*]. Don't go, Camilla.

[She takes his hand.]

CHANCELLOR. Shall I withdraw, your Majesty ?

QUEEN. You are aware, Camilla, that Prince Simon arrives to-day ?

PRINCESS. He has arrived. They're just letting down the drawbridge.

KING [*jumping up*]. Arrived ! I must——

PRINCESS. Darling, you know what the drawbridge is like. It takes at *least* half an hour to let it down.

KING [*sitting down*]. It wants oil. [*To the CHANCELLOR*]
Have *you* been grudging it oil ?

PRINCESS. It wants a new drawbridge, darling.

CHANCELLOR. Have I your Majesty's permission——

KING. Yes, yes. [*The CHANCELLOR bows and goes out.*]

QUEEN. You've told him, of course ? It's the only chance.

KING. Er—no. I was just going to, when——

QUEEN. Then I'd better. [*She goes to the door.*] You can explain to the girl ; I'll have her sent to you. You've told Camilla ?

KING. Er—no. I was just going to, when——

QUEEN. Then you'd better tell her now.

KING. My dear, are you sure——

QUEEN. It's the only chance left. [*Dramatically to heaven*]
My daughter ! *[She goes out.]*

[There is a little silence when she is gone.]

KING. Camilla, I want to talk seriously to you about marriage.

PRINCESS. Yes, Father.

KING. It is time that you learnt some of the facts of life.

PRINCESS. Yes, Father.

KING. Now the great fact about marriage is that once you're married you live happy ever after. All our history books affirm this.

PRINCESS. And your own experience too, darling.

KING [*with dignity*]. Let us confine ourselves to history for the moment.

PRINCESS. Yes, Father.

KING. Of course, there *may* be an exception here and there, which, as it were, proves the rule ; just as—oh, well, never mind.

PRINCESS [*smiling*]. Go on, darling. You were going to say that an exception here and there proves the rule that all princesses are beautiful.

KING. Well—leave that for the moment. The point is that it doesn't matter *how* you marry, or *whom* you marry, as long as you *get* married. Because you'll be happy ever after in any case. Do you follow me so far ?

PRINCESS. Yes, Father.

KING. Well, your mother and I have a little plan—

PRINCESS. Was that it, going out of the door just now ?

KING. Er—yes. It concerns your waiting-maid.

PRINCESS. Darling, I have several.

KING. Only one that leaps to the eye, so to speak. The one with the—well, with everything.

PRINCESS. Dulcibella ?

KING. That's the one. It is our little plan that at the first meeting she should pass herself off as the Princess—a harmless ruse, of which you will find frequent record in the history books—and allure Prince Simon to his—that is to say, bring him up to the— In other words, the wedding will take place immediately afterwards, and as quietly as possible—

well, naturally in view of the fact that your Aunt Malkin is one hundred and fifty-two⁷; and since you will be wearing the family bridal veil—which is no doubt how the custom arose—the surprise after the ceremony will be his. Are you following me at all? Your attention seems to be wandering.

PRINCESS. I was wondering why you needed to tell me.

KING. Just a precautionary measure, in case you happened to meet the Prince or his attendant before the ceremony; in which case, of course, you would pass yourself off as the maid——

PRINCESS. A harmless ruse, of which, also, you will find frequent record in the history books.

KING. Exactly. But the occasion need not arise.

A VOICE [*announcing*]. The woman Dulcibella!

KING. Ah! [*To the PRINCESS*] Now, Camilla, if you will just retire to your own apartments, I will come to you there when we are ready for the actual ceremony.

[*He leads her out as he is talking; and as he returns calls out*

Come in, my dear!

[*DULCIBELLA comes in. She is beautiful, but dumb.* Now don't be frightened, there is nothing to be frightened about. Has her Majesty told you what you have to do?

DULCIBELLA. Y-yes, your Majesty.

KING. Well now, let's see how well you can do it. You are sitting here, we will say. [*He leads her to a seat.*] Now imagine that I am Prince Simon [*He curls his moustache and puts his stomach in. She giggles.*] You are the beautiful Princess Camilla whom he has never seen. [*She giggles again.*] This is a serious moment in your life, and you will find that a giggle will not be helpful. [*He goes to the door.*] I am announced: "His Royal Highness Prince Simon!" That's me being announced. Remember what I said about

giggling. You should have a far-away look upon the face. [*She does her best.*] Farther away than that. [*She tries again.*] No, that's too far. You are sitting there, thinking beautiful thoughts—in maiden meditation, fancy-free, as I remember saying to her Majesty once . . . speaking of somebody else . . . fancy-free, but with the mouth definitely shut—that's better. I advance and fall upon one knee. [*He does so.*] You extend your hand graciously—*graciously*; you're not trying to push him in the face—that's better, and I raise it to my lips—so—and I kiss it—[*He kisses it warmly.*]—no, perhaps not so ardently as that, more like this [*He kisses it again.*], and I say, "Your Royal Highness, this is the most—er—Your Royal Highness, I shall ever be"—no—"Your Royal Highness, it is the proudest—" Well, the point is that *he* will say it, and it will be something complimentary, and then he will take your hand in both of his, and press it to his heart. [*He does so.*] And then—what do *you* say?

DULCIBELLA. Coo !

KING. No, *not* "Coo."

DULCIBELLA. Never had anyone do *that* to me before.

KING. That also strikes the wrong note. What you want to say is, "Oh, Prince Simon !" . . . Say it.

DULCIBELLA [*loudly*]. Oh, Prince Simon !

KING. No, no. You don't need to shout until he has said "What?" two or three times. Always consider the possibility that he *isn't* deaf. Softly, and giving the words a dying fall, letting them play around his head like a flight of doves.

DULCIBELLA [*still a little over-loud*]. O-o-o-o-h, Prinsimon !

KING. Keep the idea in your mind of a flight of *doves* rather than a flight of panic-stricken elephants, and you will be all right. Now I'm going to get up, and you must, as it were, *waft* me into a seat by your side. [*She starts wafting.*] Not rescuing a drowning man, that's another idea altogether,

useful at times, but at the moment inappropriate. Wafting. Prince Simon will put the necessary muscles into play—all you require to do is to indicate by a gracious movement of the hand the seat you require him to take. Now ! [*He gets up, a little stiffly, and sits next to her.*] That was better. Well, here we are. Now, I think you give me a look ; something, let us say, half-way between the breathless adoration of a nun and the voluptuous abandonment of a woman of the world ; with an undertone of regal dignity, touched, as it were, with good comradeship. Now try that. [*She gives him a vacant look of bewilderment.*] Frankly, that didn't quite get it. There was just a little something missing. An absence, as it were, of all the qualities I asked for, and in their place an odd resemblance to an unsatisfied fish. Let us try to get at it another way. Dulcibella, have you a young man of your own ?

DULCIBELLA [*eagerly, seizing his hand*]. Oo, ycs, he's ever so smart, he's an archer, well not as you might say a real archer, he works in the armoury, but old Bottlenose, *you* know who I mean, the Captain of the Guard, says the very next man they ever has to shoot, my Eg shall take his place, knowing Father and how it is with Eg and me, and me being maid to her Royal Highness and can't marry me till he's a real soldier, but ever so loving, and funny like, the things he says, I said to him once, "Eg," I said——

KING [*getting up*]. I rather fancy, Dulcibella, that if you think of Eg all the time, *say* as little as possible, and, when thinking of Eg, see that the mouth is not more than partially open, you will do very well. I will show you where you are to sit and wait for his Royal Highness. [*He leads her out. On the way he is saying*] Now remember—waft—waft—not hoick.

[PRINCE SIMON wanders in from the back unannounced.]

He is a very ordinary-looking young man in rather dusty clothes. He gives a deep sigh of relief as he sinks into the KING'S throne. . . .

[CAMILLA, a new and strangely beautiful CAMILLA, comes in.

PRINCESS [*surprised*]. Well !

PRINCE. Oh, hallo !

PRINCESS. Ought you ?

PRINCE [*getting up*]. Do sit down, won't you ?

PRINCESS. Who are you, and how did you get here ?

PRINCE. Well, that's rather a long story. Couldn't we sit down ? You could sit here if you liked, but it isn't very comfortable.

PRINCESS. That is the King's Throne.

PRINCE. Oh, is that what it is ?

PRINCESS. Thrones are not meant to be comfortable.

PRINCE. Well, I don't know if they're meant to be, but they certainly aren't.

PRINCESS. Why were you sitting on the King's Throne, and who are you ?

PRINCE. My name is Carlo.

PRINCESS. Mine is Dulcibella.

PRINCE. Good. And now couldn't we sit down ?

PRINCESS [*sitting down on the long seat to the left of the throne, and, as it were, wafting him to a place next to her*]. You may sit here, if you like. Why are you so tired ? [*He sits down.*

PRINCE. I've been taking very strenuous exercise.

PRINCESS. Is that part of the long story ?

PRINCE. It is.

PRINCESS [*settling herself*]. I love stories.

PRINCE. This isn't a story really. You see, I'm attendant on Prince Simon, who is visiting here.

PRINCESS. Oh ? I'm attendant on her Royal Highness.

PRINCE. Then you know what he's here for.

PRINCESS. Yes

PRINCE. She's very beautiful, I hear.

PRINCESS. Did you hear that? Where have you been lately?

PRINCE. Travelling in distant lands—with Prince Simon.

PRINCESS. Ah! All the same, I don't understand. Is Prince Simon in the Palace now? The drawbridge *can't* be down yet!

PRINCE. I don't suppose it is. *And* what a noise it makes coming down!

PRINCESS. Isn't it terrible?

PRINCE. I couldn't stand it any more. I just had to get away. That's why I'm here.

PRINCESS. But how?

PRINCE. Well, there's only one way, isn't there? That beech tree, and then a swing and a grab for the battlements, and don't ask me to remember it all—— [*He shudders.*]

PRINCESS. You mean you came across the moat by that beech tree?

PRINCE. Yes. I got so tired of hanging about.

PRINCESS. But it's terribly dangerous!

PRINCE. That's why I'm so exhausted. Nervous shock.
[*He lies back and breathes loudly.*]

PRINCESS. Of course, it's different for *me*.

PRINCE [*sitting up*]. Say that again. I must have got it wrong.

PRINCESS. It's different for *me*. because I'm used to it. Besides, I'm so much lighter.

PRINCE. You don't mean that *you*——

PRINCESS. Oh yes, often.

PRINCE. And I thought I was a brave man! At least, I didn't until five minutes ago, and now I don't again.

PRINCESS. Oh, but you are! And I think it's wonderful to do it straight off the first time.

PRINCE. Well, *you* did.

PRINCESS. Oh no, not the first time. When I was a child.

PRINCE. You mean that you crashed ?

PRINCESS. Well, you only fall into the moat.

PRINCE. Only ! Can you *swim* ?

PRINCESS. Of course.

PRINCE. So you swam to the castle walls, and yelled for help, and they fished you out and walloped you. And next day you tried again. Well, if *that* isn't pluck——

PRINCESS. Of course I didn't. I swam back, and did it at once ; I mean I tried again at once. It wasn't until the third time that I actually did it. You see, I was afraid I might lose my nerve.

PRINCE. Afraid she might lose her nerve !

PRINCESS. There's a way of getting over from this side, too ; a tree grows out from the wall and you jump into another tree—I don't think it's quite so easy.

PRINCE. Not quite so easy. Good. You must show me.

PRINCESS. Oh, I will.

PRINCE. Perhaps it might be as well if you taught me how to swim first. I've often heard about swimming, but never——

PRINCESS. You can't swim ?

PRINCE. No. Don't look so surprised. There are a lot of other things which I can't do. I'll tell you about them as soon as you have a couple of years to spare.

PRINCESS. You can't swim and yet you crossed by the beech tree ! And you're *ever* so much heavier than I am ! Now who's brave ?

PRINCE [*getting up*]. You keep talking about how light you are. I must see if there's anything in it. Stand up ! [*She stands obediently and he picks her up.*] You're right, Dulcibella. I could hold you here for ever. [*Looking at her*]

You're very lovely. Do you know how lovely you are?

PRINCESS. Yes. *[She laughs suddenly and happily.]*

PRINCE. Why do you laugh?

PRINCESS. Aren't you tired of holding me?

PRINCE. Frankly, yes. I exaggerated when I said I could hold you for ever. When you've been hanging by the arms for ten minutes over a very deep moat, wondering if it's too late to learn to swim—*[He puts her down.]*—what I meant was that I should *like* to hold you for ever. Why did you laugh?

PRINCESS. Oh, well, it was a little private joke of mine.

PRINCE. If it comes to that, I've got a private joke too. Let's exchange them.

PRINCESS. Mine's very private. One other woman in the whole world knows, and that's all.

PRINCE. Mine's just as private. One other man knows, and that's all.

PRINCESS. What fun. I love secrets. . . . Well, here's mine. When I was born, one of my godmothers promised that I should be very beautiful.

PRINCE. How right she was.

PRINCESS. But the other one said this :

I give you with this kiss

A wedding-day surprise.

Where ignorance is bliss

'Tis folly to be wise.

And nobody knew what it meant. And I grew up very plain. And then, when I was about ten, I met my god-mother in the forest one day. It was my tenth birthday. Nobody knows this—except you.

PRINCE. Except us.

PRINCESS. Except us. And she told me what her gift meant. It meant that I *was* beautiful—but everybody else

was to go on being ignorant, and thinking me plain, until my wedding-day. Because, she said, she didn't want me to grow up spoilt and wilful and vain, as I should have done if everybody had always been saying how beautiful I was; and the best thing in the world, she said, was to be quite sure of yourself, but not to expect admiration from other people. So ever since then my mirror has told me I'm beautiful, and everybody else thinks me ugly, and I get a lot of fun out of it.

PRINCE. Well, seeing that Dulcibella is the result, I can only say that your godmother was very, very wise.

PRINCESS. And now tell me *your* secret.

PRINCE. It isn't such a pretty one. You see, Prince Simon was going to woo Princess Camilla, and he'd heard that she was beautiful and haughty and imperious—all *you* would have been if your godmother hadn't been so wise. And being a very ordinary-looking fellow himself, he was afraid she wouldn't think much of him, so he suggested to one of his attendants, a man called Carlo, of extremely attractive appearance, that *he* should pretend to be the Prince, and win the Princess' hand; and then at the last moment they would change places——

PRINCESS. How would they do that?

PRINCE. The Prince was going to have been married in full armour—with his visor down.

PRINCESS [*laughing happily*]. Oh, what fun!

PRINCE. Neat, isn't it?

PRINCESS [*laughing*]. Oh, very . . . very . . . very.

PRINCE. Neat, but not so terribly *funny*. Why do you keep laughing?

PRINCESS. Well, that's another secret.

PRINCE. If it comes to that, I've got another one up my sleeve. Shall we exchange again?

PRINCESS. All right. You go first this time.

PRINCE. Very well. . . . I am not Carlo. [*Standing up and speaking dramatically*] I am Simon !—ow !

[*He sits down and rubs his leg violently*]

PRINCESS [*alarmed*]. What is it ?

PRINCE. Cramp. [*In a mild voice, still rubbing*] I was saying that I was Prince Simon.

PRINCESS. Shall I rub it for you ? [*She rubs.*]

PRINCE [*still hopefully*]. I am Simon.

PRINCESS. Is that better ?

PRINCE [*despairingly*]. I am Simon.

PRINCESS. I know.

PRINCE. How did you know ?

PRINCESS. Well, you told me.

PRINCE. But oughtn't you to swoon or something ?

PRINCESS. Why ? History records many similar ruses.

PRINCE [*amazed*]. Is that so ? I've never read history. I thought I was being profoundly original.

PRINCESS. Oh, no ! Now I'll tell you *my* secret. For reasons very much like your own the Princess Camilla, who is held to be extremely plain, feared to meet Prince Simon. Is the drawbridge down yet ?

PRINCE. Do your people give a faint, surprised cheer every time it gets down ?

PRINCESS. Naturally.

PRINCE. Then it came down about three minutes ago.

PRINCESS. Ah ! Then at this very moment your man Carlo is declaring his passionate love for my maid, Dulcibella. That, I think, is funny. [*So does the PRINCE. He laughs heartily.*] Dulcibella, by the way, is in love with a man she calls Eg, so I hope Carlo isn't getting carried away.

PRINCE. Carlo is married to a girl he calls "the little woman," so Eg has nothing to fear.

PRINCESS. By the way, I don't know if you heard, but I said, or as good as said, that I am the Princess Camilla.

PRINCE. I wasn't surprised. History, of which I read a great deal, records many similar ruses.

PRINCESS [*laughing*]. Simon !

PRINCE [*laughing*]. Camilla ! [*He stands up.*] May I try holding you again ? [*She nods. He takes her in his arms and kisses her.*] Sweetheart !

PRINCESS. You see, when you lifted me up before, you said, "You're very lovely," and my godmother said that the first person to whom I would seem lovely was the man I should marry ; so I knew then that you were Simon and I should marry you.

PRINCE. I knew directly I saw you that I should marry you, even if you were Dulcibella. By the way, which of you *am* I marrying ?

PRINCESS. When she lifts her veil, it will be Camilla. [*Voices are heard outside.*] Until then it will be Dulcibella.

PRINCE [*in a whisper*]. Then good-bye, Camilla, until you lift your veil.

PRINCESS. Good-bye, Simon, until you raise your visor.

[*The KING and QUEEN come in arm-in-arm, followed by CARLO and DULCIBELLA, also arm-in-arm. The CHANCELLOR precedes them, walking backward, at a loyal angle.*]

PRINCE [*supporting the CHANCELLOR as an accident seems inevitable*]. Careful !

[*The CHANCELLOR turns indignantly round.*]

KING. Who and what is this ? More accurately, who and what are all these ?

CARLO. My attendant, Carlo, your Majesty. He will, with your Majesty's permission, prepare me for the ceremony.

[*The PRINCE bows.*]

KING. Of course, of course !

QUEEN [*to DULCIBELLA*]. Your maid, Dulcibella, is it not, my love ? [*DULCIBELLA nods violently.*] I thought so. [*To CARLO*] She will prepare her Royal Highness.

[*The PRINCESS curtsies.*]

KING. Ah, yes. Yes. Most important.

PRINCESS [*curtsying*]. I beg pardon, your Majesty, if I've done wrong, but I found the gentleman wandering——

KING [*crossing to her*]. Quite right, my dear, quite right. [*He pinches her cheek, and takes advantage of this kingly gesture to say in a loud whisper*] We've pulled it off !

[*They sit down ; the KING and QUEEN on their thrones, DULCIBELLA on the PRINCESS' throne. CARLO stands behind DULCIBELLA, the CHANCELLOR on the R. of the QUEEN, and the PRINCE and PRINCESS behind the long seat on the left.*]

CHANCELLOR [*consulting documents*]. H'r'm ! Have I your Majesty's authority to put the final test to his Royal Highness ?

QUEEN [*whispering to the KING*]. Is this safe ?

KING [*whispering*]. Perfectly, my dear. I told him the answer a minute ago. [*Over his shoulder to CARLO*] Don't forget. "Dog." [*Aloud*] Proceed, your Excellency. It is my desire that the affairs of my country should ever be conducted in a strictly constitutional manner.

CHANCELLOR [*oratorically*]. By the constitution of the country, a suitor to her Royal Highness' hand cannot be deemed successful until he has given the correct answer to a riddle. [*Con conversationally*] The last suitor answered incorrectly, and thus failed to win his bride.

KING. By a coincidence he fell into the moat.

CHANCELLOR [*to CARLO*]. I have now to ask your Royal Highness if you are prepared for the ordeal ?

CARLO [*cheerfully*]. Absolutely.

CHANCELLOR. I may mention, as a matter, possibly, of some slight historical interest to our visitor, that by the constitution of the country the same riddle is not allowed to be asked on two successive occasions.

KING [*startled*]. What's that ?

CHANCELLOR. This one, it is interesting to recall, was propounded exactly a century ago, and we must take it as a fortunate omen that it was well and truly solved.

KING [*to the QUEEN*]. I may want my sword directly.

CHANCELLOR. The riddle is this. What is it which has four legs and mews like a cat ?

CARLO [*promptly*]. A dog.

KING [*still more promptly*]. Bravo, bravo !

[*He claps loudly and nudges the QUEEN, who claps too.*]

CHANCELLOR [*peering at his documents*]. According to the records of the occasion to which I referred, the correct answer would seem to be——

PRINCESS [*to the PRINCE*]. Say something, quick !

CHANCELLOR. —not dog, but——

PRINCE. Your Majesty, have I permission to speak ? Naturally his Royal Highness could not think of justifying himself on such an occasion, but I think that with your Majesty's gracious permission, I could——

KING. Certainly, certainly.

PRINCE. In our country, we have an animal to which we have given the name "dog," or, in the local dialect of the more mountainous districts, "doggie." It sits by the fireside and purrs.

CARLO. That's right. It purrs like anything.

PRINCE. When it needs milk, which is its staple food, it mews.

CARLO [*enthusiastically*]. Mews like nobody's business.

PRINCE. It also has four legs.

CARLO. One at each corner.

PRINCE. In some countries, I understand, this animal is called a "cat." In one distant country to which his Royal Highness and I penetrated it was called by the very curious name of "hippopotamus."

CARLO. That's right. [*To the PRINCE*] Do you remember that ginger-coloured hippopotamus which used to climb on to my shoulder and lick my ear?

PRINCE. I shall never forget it, sir. [*To the KING*] So you see, your Majesty—

KING. Thank you. I think that makes it perfectly clear. [*Firmly to the CHANCELLOR*] You are about to agree?

CHANCELLOR. Undoubtedly, your Majesty. May I be the first to congratulate his Royal Highness on solving the riddle so accurately?

KING. You may be the first to see that all is in order for an immediate wedding.

CHANCELLOR. Thank you, your Majesty.

[*He bows and withdraws.*]

[*The KING rises, as do the QUEEN and DULCIBELLA.*]

KING [*to CARLO*]. Doubtless, Prince Simon, you will wish to retire and prepare yourself for the ceremony.

CARLO. Thank you, sir.

PRINCE. Have I your Majesty's permission to attend his Royal Highness? It is the custom of his country for princes of the royal blood to be married in full armour, a matter which requires a certain adjustment—

KING. Of course, of course.

[*CARLO bows to the KING and QUEEN and goes out. As the PRINCE is about to follow, the KING stops him.*]

Young man, you have a quality of quickness which I admire. It is my pleasure to reward it in any way which commends itself to you.

PRINCE. Your Majesty is ever gracious. May I ask for my reward *after the ceremony*?

[*He catches the eye of the PRINCESS, and they give each other a secret smile.*]

KING. Certainly.

[*The PRINCE bows and goes out.*]

[*To DULCIBELLA*] Now, young woman, make yourself scarce. You've done your work excellently, and we will see that you and your—what was his name?

DULCIBELLA. Eg, your Majesty.

KING. —that you and your Eg are not forgotten.

DULCIBELLA. Coo! [*She curtsies and goes out.*]

PRINCESS [*calling*]. Wait for me, Dulcibella!

KING [*to the QUEEN*]. Well, my dear, we may congratulate ourselves. As I remember saying to somebody once, "You have not lost a daughter, you have gained a son." How does he strike you?

QUEEN. Stupid.

KING. They made a very handsome pair, I thought, he and Dulcibella.

QUEEN. Both stupid.

KING. I said nothing about stupidity. What I *said* was that they were both extremely handsome. That is the important thing. [*Struck by a sudden idea*] Or isn't it?

QUEEN. What do *you* think of Prince Simon, Camilla?

PRINCESS. I adore him. We shall be so happy together.

KING. Well, of course you will. I told you so. Happy ever after.

QUEEN. Run along now and get ready.

PRINCESS. Yes, Mother.

[*She throws a kiss to them and goes out.*]

KING [*anxiously*]. My dear, have we been wrong about Camilla all this time? It seemed to me that she wasn't

looking *quite* so plain as usual just now. Did *you* notice anything?

QUEEN [*carelessly*]. Just the excitement of the marriage.

KING [*relieved*]. Ah, yes, that would account for it.

CURTAIN

THE REAL ST GEORGE

by
Rodney Bennett

CHARACTERS

In the (optional) Prologue

THE MINSTREL, *a typical showman, with a streak of the mountebank in him*

HIS BOY, *an up-and-coming youth, who is overcome by stage-fright at critical moments*

THE STRANGER, *any medieval traveller. There is nothing mysterious about him. He is an educated man of good humour and fluent speech.*

In the Play

GEORGE, *17 years old in Scene I, and 34 in the other scenes.*
JULIA, *his sister, is about 16.*

VIRGILIA, *his mother, is between 35 and 40, though her great dignity and repose make her seem older.*

PASIKRATES, *the valued and trusted Master of Slaves, has risen from the ranks, in spite of lack of education, through sheer intelligent honesty and loyalty. He is 55 years old in Scene I, 72 in Scene III.*

CLAUDIUS, *aged 34, joined the army when George did, and admires him tremendously. He tries to conceal this and his other feelings behind a mask of jovial but hard-bitten cynicism. This has a way of cracking when he is worried, as he is now, because, although he will not admit as much to young Valerius, he suspects that George will land himself into trouble, and why.*

VALERIUS, *aged about 20, has not yet cultivated a mask to hide his feelings. In his admiration for George, who has been something of a military elder brother to him, he is emotional to the point of hysterics.*

THE EMPEROR DIOCLETIAN, *who is in the late fifties, has risen from the lowest ranks through sheer ability, force, and browbeating energy. He has good humour and even a certain charm when everything goes his way, but he becomes savagely bullish when crossed, or when confronted with what he does not understand.*

GUARDS, *two or more (optional).*

The action takes place in Palestine and Rome in A.D. 287 and 304.

The Prologue, which may be omitted, presents the conventional and legendary idea of St George. It takes place in an inn in 'Merrie England' in the Middle Ages.

The Real St George was first performed, without Prologue, by the B.B.C. on Sunday, April 19, 1942, with the following cast :

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|---------------------|
| <i>George</i> | . . . | CARLETON HOBBS |
| <i>Julia</i> | . . . | JANE BARRETT |
| <i>Virgilia</i> | . . . | VIVIENNE CHATTERTON |
| <i>Pasikerates</i> | . . . | ERNEST JAY |
| <i>The Emperor Diocletian</i> | | WILFRED BABBAGE |
| <i>Claudius</i> | . . . | GEORGE HOLLOWAY |
| <i>Valerius</i> | . . . | ROGER SNOWDON |
| <i>A Speaker</i> | . . . | EILEEN MOLONY |

RODNEY BENNETT, at the outset of his career, was a schoolmaster, during which time he gained invaluable experience producing school plays and wrote his first book, *Play Production for Amateurs*.

Then he gave up teaching and became a professional singer, giving a number of broadcasts and appearing in opera at the Old Vic.

As a hobby he writes verse and this includes (under the pseudonym of *Royden Barrie*) several songs which have been popular all over the world. He has also written the libretti of a number of children's and adult operas. One, *Julia*, with Roger Quilter's music, was produced at Covent Garden.

One day, for one of his children, he made up a story about a pig ; it was published, and, in his own words, he has "been kept busy writing stories, plays and verse for children ever since."

His book *Let's do a play !* is still one of the most popular of its kind.

When there is time he lectures on the drama.

The Real St George has been broadcast. It is an outstanding play which leaves no doubt about the author's qualities as a playwright.

THE REAL ST GEORGE¹

THE PROLOGUE

The SCENE is a private room in a medieval inn.

The MINSTREL and his BOY are supposed to be just finishing a rehearsal. It ends with a series of flourishing harp chords, real or mimed, after about the second of which the curtain rises.

The MINSTREL is seen executing his final chords, seated. Directly he has struck the last he springs to his feet and bows right and left, smiling, with every sign of surprise and gratification. The BOY meanwhile stands close by, looking most unhappy and hardly joining in at all. The MINSTREL notices him, looks at him as if giving him up in despair, and begins :

MINSTREL. Go on, Boy, bow. We have finished, don't you understand? When you see me bow, you bow. Don't just stand there.

BOY. No, Master.

MINSTREL. And do sound a bit more cheerful.

BOY [*more dismally than ever*]. Yes, Master.

MINSTREL. If ever you want to be a minstrel yourself, you will have to do better than that, you know. I know to-night will be your first appearance, but there is no need to look as if you were going to be hanged. Just try to look forward to it—the Castle, to-night; the hall lit with torches; us finishing our piece; the lords and ladies clapping, and the riff-raff shouting and stamping until the dust rises out of the floor-boards in clouds. Can't you see it, Boy?

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to The University of London Press, Ltd., St Hugh's School, Bickley, Kent.

BOY. No, Master. I only wish I could.

MINSTREL. No imagination. That's what is wrong with you. Listen. Come here. [*Sits, and the BOY sits or kneels by him.*] They are lords and ladies up there at the Castle, I know ; but all the same, they are delighted to see a minstrel and hear his ballads. So would you be if you had nothing to pass the long evenings. They see you and me. They hope for the best. They get something better—a brand-new ballad, made up by me. You mustn't throw it all away by looking as if you had a pain in your innards. [*Rises.*] Come now. We'll even do the end again. Take your place. [*Takes harp and sits.*] We have gone right through. We come to the last verse. [*Clears throat and declaims*]

So ends the Ballad of Saint George,

Ye Nobles in this hall.

We bid you now farewell, and may

The Lord protect us all !

[*He bounds up and bows as before, while the BOY does his best, which is not very good until his master exhorts him.*] Go on. Lower. Again, lower. And don't hold yourself in the middle. And smile. Smile, Boy. *That's* it. And you will do better still, to-night, up there. They will give me good red gold, and even a groat or two to you, if only you play your part as well as I play mine. So cheer up, Boy. You know your lines.

BOY. Yes, but I shall forget every one directly I set eyes on those lords and ladies. I know it. If only I could have tried my part before somebody else first, even the folk here at the inn !

MINSTREL. What !—and risk some other rogue of a minstrel getting wind of it, and stealing the good Saint George from

us? Don't you so much as breathe about it, do you hear?
—or I'll wring your neck for you.

BOY. Yes, Master.

MINSTREL. Hush. Isn't that someone coming along the passage? [*A knock at the door.*] Now who might that be? Come in!

STRANGER [*entering*]. Oh, pardon, friends. Like a fool I have forgotten which is my room. So I knocked first. No offence, I hope.

MINSTREL. Not a bit, sir, not a bit. [*To BOY, who has begun making urgent signs*] What's the matter, Boy?

BOY. Well, Master—I was thinking—couldn't you get the gentleman to help us? You know, Master—what I said—hear it?

MINSTREL. Why, yes. It might be a good plan. Come in, sir. Sit you down, sir.

STRANGER. You are very good. What can I do for you?

MINSTREL. Well, sir, it's like this. Do you mind if I just shut the door first? . . . That's better. As I was saying, sir, have you a taste for ballads, stories and such, sir?

STRANGER. All the world loves a story.

MINSTREL. Exactly, sir. Well, sir, I am a minstrel and this is my boy. To-night we are due at the Castle here, and he is as nervous as a cat because this is his first appearance in any castle. I wondered if you would be so kind as to hear our ballad, to give him confidence.

STRANGER. With all my heart. What is the title, Minstrel?

MINSTREL. A new one, sir. You can take my word for that.

STRANGER. A new ballad! Indeed! And what is the subject, friend?

MINSTREL. The title, sir, is "A Merry Ballad of Good Saint George of England," sir, "And how he did slay the Foul

Dragon," sir, "And save the Fair Princess." . . . That's *him*.

STRANGER. I'm afraid I don't understand, Minstrel.

MINSTREL. Him—my boy, sir. He is to play the part of the Fair Princess, though he don't look it, sir, I own. Stand up, Boy, do, and don't bite your nails! But, sir, I thought to myself, "Why not? Most ordinary minstrels speak the whole ballad right through in their own voice, I know. But since there's a Princess in it," I said to myself, sir, "why not let the boy speak her, while I speak Saint George, and the Dragon, and all the rest? Why not?" I said.

STRANGER. Indeed. Why not?

MINSTREL. Ah, sir. You may well ask why not? Because that boy is as like as not to forget every word when it comes to the push—Stop scratching your head, Boy, do! Not having spoken a word of it to a living soul before. Which brings me back to the question: Will you hear us perform it, sir, as before Duke Rollo up at the Castle there?

STRANGER. With all my heart.

MINSTREL. And tell us your honest opinion?

STRANGER. If need be.

MINSTREL. And not say a word of it to a living soul until after the first speaking?

STRANGER. On my honour.

MINSTREL. Then—come up, Boy, and stop scratching. That's the worst of sleeping in a stable, sir. Go over by the door there, and be ready to trip on at the proper time. And when I say trip, I mean trip, not lumber on like a dancing bear in a ploughed field. Go on, now, over by the door. . . . A good boy, sir, but weak in the head, I fear. Now, are you ready, Boy?

BOY [*dithering*]. Y-yes, Master.

MINSTREL. Ah, and you sound it! Well, sir, I'll just give

a chord or two to start us, and then set the harp aside by your leave. The boy will have enough to think of as it is, without sweet music to bewitch him. Now——

[*Strident harp chords.*]

Lithe and listen, gentlemen,
Good people in this hall :
I'll tell you the tale of a goodly knight,
A valiant man and tall.

'Twas long and long ago he lived
And won him deathless fame.
In Palestine he had his home,
Saint George it was his name.

When he to manhood years had come,
He up and left his home,
And rode away with sword at side
To serve the King of Rome.

He had not gone a league, a league,
A league but ten or more,
When what should he see but a fair princess,
And she was weeping sore. . . .
[*Giving the cue again with vinegary emphasis*
And—she—was—weeping—sore.

[*Bellowing*] Where's that boy ? Where is that boy ? What are you standing there gaping for ? Don't you know that "weeping sore" is your line ? Bless my soul ! I'll give it you again, and just you come tripping on, *and* weeping sore, or you'll be weeping *and* sore, and you take my word for that. Now then : "And *she* was weeping sore." [BOY *advances.*] That's better.

"Now what can ail thee, gentle maid,
That tears should fill thine eye?"

Go on, now!—"I weep because" . . .

BOY. "I weep because mine end is near,
Because to-day I die."

MINSTREL. Good!

BOY. "Nigh to this place a dragon dwells
That every day must dine.
Each day a fair maid dies by lot.
To-day's lot falls to mine."

MINSTREL. "Now, by the cross of my good sword,
'Tis he, not thou, shall die."

BOY. "Oh stay, sir Knight! Why shouldst thou
give
Thy life as well as I?"

MINSTREL. "Have you no fear for me, fair maid,
For, as you soon shall see,
It is not *I* shall fall to *him*,
But *he* shall fall to *me*."

He's ta'en his trusty blade in hand.
He's sought that dragon's lair.
Despite of poison reek and flame,
He's slain the foul beast there.

How's that, sir?

STRANGER. As remarkable a ballad as ever I heard. How
do you end it?

MINSTREL. I was just coming to that, sir. Are you ready,
Boy? [*He is scratching again.*] Stop—that—that's better.

Now lithe and listen, gentlemen,
My story strange as true—

STRANGER. Ah, but that's it: *is it*?

MINSTREL. I beg pardon, sir ? Is it what ?

STRANGER. I mean—the story is certainly strange, but when you say it is true, that is another matter. That dragon and princess and brave-hero story has been going the rounds this thousand years and more. There is the story of Perseus and Andromeda, for example.

MINSTREL. I can't say I've met the lady, sir. And as for what you have just remarked, well, sir, I've never thought about it. George, and the lady and the dragon, that's how it always has been since Richard the Lion Heart came home from the Crusades. I don't know rightly where it was, but they say that the King himself found a fine church out there, named after the saint—Saint George, that is—with fine crimson roses growing all round ; and presently, in the heat of battle, what should the good king see but the figure of Saint George himself, all in shining armour with a red cross on his shield, leading our men against the foe !

STRANGER. And long may he do so, friend ! Yes, it's a great story. But to my mind the true story is finer still, even if there is no dragon in it.

MINSTREL. No dragon, sir ?

STRANGER. No, nor shining armour nor fair princess.

MINSTREL. But, sir !—you can't have a story of that kind without a fair princess, surely.

STRANGER. You can, friend, and a fine one, too.

MINSTREL. Well, sir, one lives and learns. Won't you tell us the story, sir ? We shall be all ears, I promise you.

STRANGER. If I could tell the story, Minstrel, as you could, so 'that you can seem to see the people, and hear them speaking . . .

MINSTREL. Well, sir, a man can but do his best. I was a novice myself, once. So say on, sir, and leave the imagining to us. Where does the story begin, sir, and when ?

STRANGER. A thousand years and more ago, in a Roman villa near Jerusalem, in Palestine, for Palestine was a Roman province then. You must imagine the room, a fine handsome place, and through the wide doorway you may see the olive trees and cypresses, faint in the heat haze. There is an oldish man in the room, rubbing away at something with a cloth. Listen to what he is saying.

[The curtain rises, and Scene I proceeds without a pause.]

INTRODUCTION

(to be omitted if the Prologue is used)

SPEAKER *[appearing before the closed curtains]*. Saint George, Patron Saint of England, whose broad red cross is the basis of our flag, and whose day we keep on the twenty-third of April—Saint George of England, Saint George for England. . . . Every Englishman knows the name, and the picture too, yet how many know anything about the real man, the subject of our play—the Real Saint George?

Perhaps it is that same picture that has something to do with it; seeing the writhing dragon belching fire and smoke, one is apt to assume that the man striking at him is no more than a figure of legend; that there never was a real Saint George. But there was, and a great one, too. He was a famous Roman soldier, and he died in the year 304—you will see how and why.

By the time Richard the Lion Heart went crusading to the Holy Land, George had become a saint, with many churches to his name. The story goes that the Lion Heart came upon one of them, all ringed about with red-rose trees; and presently, when hard pressed in battle, what should he see but the soldier-saint himself, all in shining armour with

a blood-red cross on the shield, leading our men against the Saracens.

But let us leave legend and go back to history. It is the year of our Lord 287. Diocletian is Emperor of Rome. George, a boy of seventeen, is master of his father's fine estates near Jerusalem—for Palestine was a Roman province in those days. Imagine the villa set among olives and cypresses. It is high morning, and through the wide doorway we can see the trees faint in the heat haze.

The oldish man in the room is Pasikrates, Master of George's slaves.

[*The curtain rises.*]

SCENE I

A room in the Roman villa near Jerusalem which is George's home. Mid morning.

PASIKRATES, Master of George's slaves, a man of about 55, is irritably polishing a metal salver or something of the kind, which does not in the least need it.

PASIKRATES. Never in all my born days did I see the like of it. They call this salver bright !

JULIA [*entering from house*]. Why, Pasikrates ! What are you doing ?

PASIKRATES [*testily*]. Polishing a salver, my Lady Julia.

JULIA. So I see, Pasikrates. And since when has the master of the slaves taken to polishing salvers ?

PASIKRATES. Master of the slaves ! Slaves, you call them ! Sluts, I call them. Slaves never went on like this over there in Jerusalem in my young days.

[*He continues polishing and busying about the room.*]

JULIA. Didn't they, Pasikrates ? But don't look so angry. You mustn't be too hard on them. After all, this is something of a special day.

PASIKRATES. Special day, indeed! Is that any reason for leaving the house like a pigsty? Special day! Anyone would think your brother was coming back in triumph from the wars, instead of merely setting off to Nicomedia to begin his military training.

JULIA. Yes. . . . Oh, Pasikrates!—I can't think of home here without George. I don't know what I shall do.

PASIKRATES. Now, now! That's no way for a young Roman lady to talk.

JULIA. No. I ought to pretend not to care—like you.

PASIKRATES. I? I pretend? Absurd!

JULIA [*sitting*]. You care, just as much as I do.

PASIKRATES. Ridiculous! Of course I don't. And—and if I do—do you think I'm not a man, just because I am a slave? Besides, it's the journey I am thinking of, the road to Nicomedia. Those hills of Judæa and Samaria are alive with robbers and brigands and—who knows what? If only I could go with him! If only I wasn't so old!

JULIA. Old? Why, you're not sixty yet. You'll never be old, Pasikrates. I'll tell you another thing: it's not the journey you're thinking of. All those men with him—why, they make a small army. Besides, George is almost a man now. Seventeen.

PASIKRATES. Yes. Seventeen. It is hard to credit. It seems only yesterday he was so high, and I was teaching him to toddle. I found one of the others trying to, but I soon sent *him* away with a flea in his ear. And then, before a man knew where he was, those tutors as you call them were teaching him to read and write. How I hated not being able to help! I did try to learn, but my fingers were all thumbs—cack-handed old fool! [*He stops being busy.*] I suppose it would have been different if your father had lived, but somehow I felt I had to look after him. He

seemed like my own son. Eh !—I've been a proud man to see him grow up fit to be heir to all these great estates, fit to serve the Emperor . . . And now the day has come. It'll never be the same again. What the Lady Virgilia will do, I don't know.

JULIA. Yes. Poor Mother ! . . .

PASIKRATES [*becoming busy again*]. But she won't show it, my Lady Julia, not she. You mark my words : she'll keep a brave face. Yes, and so will we. After all, my Lady Julia, only a year or two, and we shall see him again.

JULIA. You, yes. But where shall I be ? Married, in a far province, who knows ?

PASIKRATES. Now, now ! There's no need to expect the worst. And ' Who knows ' is what nobody knows, as the saying is.

VIRGILIA [*off, calling*]. Julia !

PASIKRATES. It's the Lady Virgilia. Now remember : you must help her to bear it.

JULIA. I'll try, Pasikrates.

PASIKRATES. There, there ! I'll go and fetch my master.

[*He goes out to garden.*]

VIRGILIA [*entering*]. Julia.

JULIA [*breaking down*]. Oh, Mother !

VIRGILIA. Hush, Julia ! We mustn't let him see how much we shall miss him.

JULIA. It is so hard.

VIRGILIA. Parting is always hard, Julia. [*She sits.*] It is time my son was gone.

GEORGE [*appearing at garden entrance*]. Mother !

VIRGILIA. It is high time you were away, my son.

GEORGE [*coming in*]. I'm ready. I only wait for your blessing. [*He kneels.*]

VIRGILIA. The good God bless you always, my son. Be

always upright, unwavering in faith, compassionate, patient, and without fear.

GEORGE. I'll try, my mother.

VIRGILIA. And George——

GEORGE. Yes, Mother?

VIRGILIA. Never forget that you were bred a Christian. You were baptized as you lay in my arms. The hands were laid upon you when you were old enough to understand the vows you were taking. Now you must show that you did understand. Every chance is open to you, my son. The Emperor knows of you. But however great a soldier you may be, remember this: you serve the Emperor, and the Emperor is mighty; but high above him stands the Living God, with Christ Jesus His Son. First and last you are God's servant, Christ's man-at-arms. Never be afraid to own it.

GEORGE [*rising*]. Afraid? But, Mother, why should I be afraid? Back in the days when He said, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you"—it was different then. A man needed a stout heart to stand for Christ. But that's nearly three hundred years ago. Persecution is forgotten. It's easy to be a Christian now.

VIRGILIA. Is it, my son? I think it will never be easy to be a Christian. You may yet have to choose between God and an emperor, between great place and shameful death. I hope that time may never come; but if it does, I think I can trust you to choose right, my son.

GEORGE. Yes. I think you could trust me—then. [*A slight pause.*] But how gloomy we are! Good-bye, Mother. Good-bye, little sister. Don't look so sad. Think of me sometimes. I shall think of you always, and wish you well. Now where is that old rascal, Pasikrates? [*He goes off by garden door, calling*] Pasikrates! Pasikrates! . . .

VIRGILIA. Come here, Julia.

JULIA [*kneeling by her*]. Oh, Mother !

VIRGILIA. Why should you weep, little one ? You'll see him again. I never shall.

JULIA. How can you say that ? How can you know ?

VIRGILIA. I do not know how, but I know. [*Distant sounds of cheerful shouts and stamping hoofs. VIRGILIA rises.*] Listen. [*She goes to the garden door.*] He is going.

[*She stands there, with her back to the audience. The sounds of farewell shouts increase. Horses are heard to break into a gallop. The sound soon fades. JULIA remains kneeling, weeping silently.*]

Good-bye, my son . . . my son.

SLOW CURTAIN

SCENE II

Seventeen years have passed since the day when George left home to begin his military training. The scene is a room in the officers' quarters at Rome.

The curtain rises, showing VALERIUS standing at the centre door with his back to the audience, waiting for the appearance of GEORGE. CLAUDIUS would like to do the same thing, but would rather die than admit it. He is trying to conceal his impatience by whistling unpleasingly as he lounges on a couch and casts dice on the low table beside it, now and then moving counters accordingly. After a time he stops whistling and addresses VALERIUS in carefully off-hand tones.

CLAUDIUS. Well, Valerius, my friend, do you see him yet, hurrying this way ?

VALERIUS [*irritably*]. See whom ?

CLAUDIUS. Whom ? Why, our hero, of course : George.

VALERIUS. How do you know I am looking for him?

CLAUDIUS. I didn't. I guessed. [*He whistles again.*]

VALERIUS. Do stop that whistling, Claudius!

CLAUDIUS. Valerius! Do remember the respect due to your elders. I whistle very well. [*Whistles.*] A little breathy perhaps, but . . . You seem very sure that George *will* come.

VALERIUS [*turning, but not coming down yet*]. Of course he will come. Why shouldn't he come?

CLAUDIUS. My dear Valerius, you are very young, and your faith in human nature is touching. Our friend is a great man now, you must remember. I knew he would be, the first day I saw him at Nicomedia when we both began our military training, seventeen years ago. You'll see. We shall soon be mighty proud to know him.

VALERIUS. I *am* proud to know him.

CLAUDIUS. But will he be proud to know us—now?

[*He begins whistling.*]

VALERIUS [*coming down*]. Why do you say sneering things like that, Claudius? You know it isn't true. You don't even mean it. George is not that sort of man. If he were, where should I be? When I began my training, my father commended me to his care—I thought it a frightful nerve—just because we both came from Cappadocia. I thought he would never even notice me. But if I had been his younger brother he could not have done more for me.

CLAUDIUS. All right, little man. Don't get hot. I was only joking.

VALERIUS. I don't think it was terribly funny.

[*Sits on stool.*]

CLAUDIUS [*throwing down dice box and beginning to move to and fro*]. To tell you the truth, my dear Valerius, neither do I. I was merely trying to hide my better nature. I am as

proud of George as you are—prouder, for I have known him ten years longer than you. And in the whole time he has never put a foot wrong. What a record! Campaign in Egypt. Loud cheers. Emperor's bodyguard, Emperor's eye on him. Two years in Persia. Terrific applause. Continues his splendid career until this last expedition, the most successful thing he has done. How will the Emperor reward him? Make him a general perhaps, if not governor over ten cities. . . .

VALERIUS. I wonder.

CLAUDIUS. What do you mean, boy: you wonder? What's to stand in his way?

VALERIUS. George is a Christian. [*Stands and moves away.*]

CLAUDIUS. What!

VALERIUS. I said, George is a Christian.

CLAUDIUS [*kicking up his feet on to the couch with an affectation of ease*]. Ha, ha! Of course, Valerius, now *you* are being funny. Not terribly, perhaps, but funny. George a Christian, is he? You don't think he is going to proclaim the fact, do you? Don't be silly. [*Throws dice.*]

VALERIUS. I am not so sure, Claudius. Ever since his mother died he has been so different about it. I think it must have been something she said.

CLAUDIUS [*seriously*]. Perhaps. He thought a great deal of her. [*Half bantering again*] But, my dear fellow, that was before he went away on this last expedition. The Emperor hadn't banned the Christians then. It was rather the thing to say you were a Christian in those days, but it's a very different thing now they are being hounded like vermin, bolting underground until the Emperor had their catacombs stopped like rat-holes. [*Rises.*] Do you think anybody but a born fool would blast his career for the sake of a pack of back-street Christians and their religion? And what a

religion ! Fishermen for apostles, and led to glory, once upon a time, by a hedge-preacher who ended up on a cross between a couple of sneak-thieves ! The son of a carpenter !

VALERIUS [*quietly*]. Jesus Christ was the Son of God.

CLAUDIUS [*sitting*]. Yes ? Well, Valerius, I am not arguing that old tale with you again. [*Whistles.*] I say, Valerius : what's the matter with you ? You needn't be afraid of me, but—but you are not a Christian yourself, by any chance, are you ?

VALERIUS [*up at door*]. I was bred to it.

CLAUDIUS. Oh yes : bred to it. There's no harm in that. I was bred to drink milk, but I've dropped it. The same with you : proclaiming you are a Christian now you are a man is just plain silly. You—you didn't think of doing so, did you, Valerius ? . . . Did you ?

VALERIUS. No. I shouldn't have the courage.

CLAUDIUS. That's all right, then.

VALERIUS. Is it ? [*Comes down.*] Claudius, you may say what you like about these Christians and their religion, but it gives them a terrible courage. Facing death on the field of battle—that's all in the day's work ; but to let yourself be dragged out in cold blood into the arena, [*with growing excitement*] and have wild beasts turned loose on you, and stand there under all those jeering faces ; to be soaked in oil and burned like a stinking candle. . . .

CLAUDIUS. Hush ! [*He runs up to door and looks out, then back to VALERIUS, who has moved down right.*] He's coming. Valerius, I take back every word. [*Kindly*] Pull yourself together now, boy. You needn't worry. He won't make a fool of himself, you will see. [*GEORGE appears at door.*]

CLAUDIUS. George ! [*Goes to him, and they come down.*]

GEORGE. Claudius ! It's good to see you again, old friend. And Valerius. . . . Why, what's the matter ?

CLAUDIUS [*shielding him till he regains control*]. Oh, don't take any notice of him, George. You know our little Valerius : working himself up in an argument, that's all. Well, man ? How are you ? Has his Mightiness made you Deputy Emperor on full pay ?

GEORGE. I haven't seen the Emperor yet.

CLAUDIUS. Mark the confidence, Valerius ; mark the soldierly calm. "I have not seen the Emperor yet !" No haste, mark you. To-morrow will do as well as to-day to be made governor or what not.

GEORGE [*quietly*]. I doubt whether I shall be made governor, Claudius, or anything else, to-day or to-morrow or the next day for that matter.

CLAUDIUS. Oh, now ! Your modesty was always your greatest charm, George ; but don't overdo it. Why not, pray ?

GEORGE. You seem to forget, Claudius : I'm a Christian.

VALERIUS [*turning*]. There ! What did I tell you ? That was what we were arguing about.

CLAUDIUS. Wait a minute, Valerius, wait a minute. George, you don't really mean you are going to tell the Emperor you are a Christian ?

GEORGE. Of course. What else should I do ?

CLAUDIUS [*after a rocket whistle*]. Valerius, once more I take it all back, because—he's mad. I respect your courage, George, but you are—stark, staring mad. And yet, I don't know ; probably the Emperor will merely say "A Christian, George ? That's all right, my boy," or words to that effect. "As long as you bow the knee in the house of Rimmon like your friend—" What was his name ?—the high-class leper, you remember . . .

GEORGE. Naaman the Syrian.

CLAUDIUS. That's the one. I thought you told that story rather well, by the way, George.

GEORGE. Did I? But it isn't quite to the point, Claudius. You see, it isn't so much myself I am thinking about. I am going to ask the Emperor to treat the Christians as he used to.

CLAUDIUS. I said he was mad. . . . George, you don't seriously mean that?

GEORGE. I do.

CLAUDIUS. You . . . oh well, if you do, you do. But I hope you won't choose a spell when Valerius and I are on bodyguard. I should hate to have to drag off the friend of my youth to the torture.

GEORGE. You think it will be that, Claudius?

CLAUDIUS. I don't think anything about it, George. It *will* be that, and then death——

VALERIUS. Don't! [*Suddenly sits, his face away from them.*]

CLAUDIUS. You see, George, our Valerius agrees. And of what use will that be to your cause? What use is it to any cause, just meekly dying for it?

GEORGE. Sometimes to die for a cause may be the only thing, Claudius. . . . [*Cheerfully, turning away*] But why jump to the worst? Fortunately the Emperor chooses to think well of me. More than once he has even asked my opinion.

CLAUDIUS. Oh yes!—and luckily for your opinion, it happened to jump with his. Don't be a fool, George. You know as well as I do: Diocletian can be the most charming of men if he happens to be in the mood, and you happen to fit it; but cross him, you or anyone else, and you will see. It's the same with all these dictators who have risen from the ranks. Diocletian began as a nobody from Dalmatia, and now what is he?—a god to every Roman with

an easy knee. Could I stand such sudden glory? Could you? No. No man could. It makes them mad—especially when they happen to be afraid.

VALERIUS. Diocletian? Afraid? Afraid of what?

CLAUDIUS. Afraid of these little Christians, Valerius.

VALERIUS [*rising*]. But that's absurd. Why should he be?

CLAUDIUS. Don't ask me. Ask the Emperor—and then run for dear life. But what I tell you is true: for some reason Diocletian fears Jesus. The Emperor fears the Carpenter's Son, God's Son, call Him what you like. Well, I have warned you, my friend: don't do it. Or at any rate, take time.

GEORGE. I am taking time. I have applied for immediate home leave. [*Turns up towards door.*]

CLAUDIUS [*meaningly*]. Oh!

VALERIUS. You—you are going home?

GEORGE. Yes.

CLAUDIUS [*cynically*]. Business?

GEORGE. Yes, Claudius. Private business.

CLAUDIUS. Ah! When do you go?

GEORGE. Within the hour. I shall see you again first.

CLAUDIUS. Good. But in case you don't, my dear George, good-bye.

[*GEORGE goes. CLAUDIUS flings himself on the couch and begins whistling and throwing the dice, but most uncheerfully. VALERIUS has turned away down-stage and is staring before him.*]

Well, my Valerius, why are you staring like that?

VALERIUS [*as if to himself*]. After all that fine talk he's—he's running away.

[*CLAUDIUS springs to his feet, flinging down the dice. Crossing the stage savagely, he swings VALERIUS round*]

by the shoulder. He may think the same as VALERIUS, but he is not going to let anyone say it.

CLAUDIUS. What's that? You cynical young beast!—say that again and I'll knock you down. Go on! Say it!

VALERIUS. Well, you thought so yourself, or why did you say "Oh" like that?

CLAUDIUS. The idea did cross my mind. Then I thought what a cad I was. [*He turns away.*] But—I wish you were right, Valerius. How I wish you were right!

[He stands staring blankly and whistling ruefully under his breath. VALERIUS has turned away and is staring at the door by which GEORGE left. There is a pause, then

QUICK CURTAIN

SCENE III

A few days later, in George's home near Jerusalem, PASIKRATES is moving slowly about his self-appointed tasks. Nothing is changed in the room since that day, so long ago, when GEORGE rode away in high heart. But PASIKRATES is an old man now, though still sturdy, and he moves nimbly enough as he lights the tapers.

Soon after the curtains part PASIKRATES stops and listens. It sounds as if there is someone moving out in the moonlit garden. But he concludes that he was mistaken. As he is lighting the last candle he hears a low whistle, and quickly extinguishes his taper.

PASIKRATES. Who's there? [*The whistle again, nearer.*] Who's there, I say?

GEORGE [*appearing in the garden doorway*]. Quietly, old friend!

PASIKRATES. Master!

GEORGE [*taking his hand*]. Well, Pasikrates, is that all you have to say : " Master " ?

PASIKRATES. Oh, Master, I am too glad to begin. I should babble for a week on end. I was—I was just lighting the last taper.

[*He turns away under pretext of putting away the taper.*]

GEORGE. So I see. Is there company, then ?

PASIKRATES. No. I was lighting it for you. Always the house is prepared—lights, your bed ready—so that if you come . . .

GEORGE [*sitting*]. And now I am come, and in a strange fashion. You needn't be afraid, Pasikrates. I haven't been getting into trouble.

PASIKRATES. Master ! As if I should think such a thing !

GEORGE. You may have cause to, before long.

PASIKRATES. Before long can wait. What am I thinking of ? You must be hungry. I'll call the . . .

[*Moving to house door.*]

GEORGE. No, don't. I don't want anyone but you to know I am here. I can only stay an hour, and there is so much to do. I want to do it first. Then you shall bring me food yourself.

PASIKRATES [*coming to him*]. What is the matter, Master ?

GEORGE. The Emperor has banned Christians, Pasikrates.

PASIKRATES. Ah ! And so you have fled in secret.

GEORGE. Pasikrates ! Would you have me do that ? Seventeen years ago, the day I went away, in this very room, my mother said, " You may yet have to make the great choice—between God and the Emperor, between great place and shameful death."

PASIKRATES [*turning away*]. Yes, Master. So now the time has come.

GEORGE. Perhaps, perhaps not. Don't fear too much. I

am going to beg the Emperor to show mercy to all Christians. I think he may.

PASIKRATES. Do you, Master ? I am only a silly old fellow, but, from what I hear, emperors are strange, wilful men.

GEORGE. Yes, I have been told all that. So there is nothing to do but to hope all may be well, and to prepare in case it is not. That is why I am here. Time would be brief, then, and give me no chance of doing what I have in mind. Pasikrates !

PASIKRATES [*returning*]. Yes, Master ?

GEORGE. I want you to listen carefully. You see this paper here ?

PASIKRATES. Yes, Master.

GEORGE. It makes you a free man, Pasikrates. . . .

PASIKRATES. But—but I don't want to be a free man, Master.

GEORGE. I know—or you would have been, this many a year.

PASIKRATES. It is so hard to be free, Master—so much easier to serve.

GEORGE [*as if to himself*]. Sometimes to serve is hard, Pasikrates. . . . But you would not wish to be sold to another master ?

PASIKRATES. You will always be my master, whatever happens.

GEORGE. And you will always be my friend. Well, take it. It frees you, as I say. Now this other deed : it frees the slaves. Presently you must give me their names to set down. But first—this third paper is my will, and it gives you certain things to do. To-morrow you will begin to sell all that is mine.

PASIKRATES. To-morrow, Master ?

GEORGE. To-morrow. Gamaliel—you know, in Jerusalem

—he will tell you what to do with the money. Some will be for you, some for the freed men. The rest you will hold in case I need it. If not—if ill news comes of me—it will be divided also. It is all here.

PASIKRATES. But the Lady Julia, Master ?

GEORGE. She and her children have more than enough, in Spain.

PASIKRATES. But, Master !—what should I do with so much money ?

GEORGE. As your good sense tells you, Pasikrates. One thing you shall do for me. Buy yourself the small farm—you know the one I mean. Bring my body home to bury under the great olive-tree.

PASIKRATES. Where I caught you climbing that time ? Oh, Master. . . .

GEORGE. Yes, those were good days. We shall never forget. But there is no time now. Give me the names of the slaves, and then some food, and then . . .

PASIKRATES [*bringing the writing-table down*]. Oh, Master, Master !—I pray the good God it may never come to that.

GEORGE. Amen. It is in the hands of God. Now, the names, in order of years of faithful service.

PASIKRATES. Yes, Master. Now let me see, let me see. First there is Simon [*GEORGE repeats each name after him while writing it*], then Lucas, . . . then Andrew, . . . then Malachi, . . . then Gideon, . . . then John, then . . .

[*The curtains have gradually been closing, and now, quietly,*

CURTAIN

SCENE IV

A room in the palace of Diocletian. CLAUDIUS is standing stubbornly down left, his back slightly turned on GEORGE beside him, who is looking up towards the centre door. Presently GEORGE turns as if resuming argument.

GEORGE. Claudius.

CLAUDIUS [*gruffly*]. What is it?

GEORGE. I wish you would go.

CLAUDIUS. As I told you before, George, here I am, and here I stay.

GEORGE. But what is the use? If the Emperor is as reasonable as I hope, I shan't need you; and if he is not—well, it will do you no good to be with me.

CLAUDIUS. Ha! Do you think anybody is going to take me for a Christian? No, save your breath, George, and I'll save mine, unless I can persuade you, even now. . . . George, he'll be coming through that door in a moment. Change your mind. Don't be a fool, man. You are throwing away everything. What is the use? Keep your mouth shut, and who knows what good you may be able to do your Christian friends? Open it, as you propose to do, and . . .

GEORGE. Hush! He is coming.

[There are distant marching feet, a word of command, and grounding of arms.]

CLAUDIUS [*urgently*]. George. . . .

[Before he can say more DIOCLETIAN appears in the doorway.]

GEORGE. Hail, Cæsar!

CLAUDIUS. Hail, Cæsar!

DIOCLETIAN [*graciously, approaching*]. George! So at last you have presented yourself. I am glad. You should have

done so before going on your leave. You would have been welcome.

GEORGE. Your pardon, Cæsar. My business was at home, and it was of urgency.

DIOCLETIAN [*jocularly*]. So ? So ! Then we will not be so indiscreet as to enquire more closely. [*He goes to his throne and sits.*] George, I have heard of your conduct of the expedition. It was no less than I expected of you, and no better, since it could hardly be that. As always, you have earned the thanks of Rome, and of your Emperor.

GEORGE. You are very kind.

DIOCLETIAN. No ; I know an outstanding man when I see one. You had already given the world an idea of your worth. This last venture has confirmed it. Now, I think, the time for expeditions is past. You are fit for larger and more settled office. The question is, in what way to use you best. You know your own capacity, and your own suggestion may well be the best one. You may ask whatever great place you desire.

GEORGE. Whatever I desire, Cæsar ?

DIOCLETIAN. We have said it. Take time to think, if you wish.

GEORGE. There is no need, Cæsar. There is one thing above all else I desire.

DIOCLETIAN. It is yours before you ask. What is it ?

GEORGE [*kneeling*]. That you should show mercy to all Christians, Cæsar.

DIOCLETIAN. What ?

CLAUDIUS [*coming over*]. Cæsar ! May I speak ?

DIOCLETIAN [*dangerously smooth*]. You, Claudius ? Speak ? But why should you ? For a moment he surprised me, but . . . [CLAUDIUS gives up and drifts away up stage, presently returning left. GEORGE rises.] My friend, I think you spoke

of Christians. There must be some good reason why you should be concerned with people so unimportant.

GEORGE. Cæsar, if they are so unimportant, they are surely not worth your anger. The lion does not concern itself with the lamb. These people set themselves in no man's path. All they ask is to be let alone. Truly, Rome has no better citizens.

DIOCLETIAN [*testy, but still quiet*]. Then why do they refuse to salute the statues of Rome's divine Emperors?

GEORGE. They mean no disrespect, Cæsar. But the Christian faith names but one God, a jealous God. "Thou shalt have none other gods but me," says the commandment. Trust them, Cæsar. You shall find no men more loyal.

DIOCLETIAN [*faster, but still quiet*]. I doubt that. They are seditious. They seek empire. They may have deceived you, but they do not deceive Cæsar. What does their favourite prayer say? "Thy kingdom come."

GEORGE. But, Cæsar, if the Christians were indeed plotters, would they admit it so openly? "Thy kingdom"—they mean the unseen kingdom of God the Father. That is no earthly kingdom. It is the kingdom of faith, of love, a kingdom in the hearts of men.

DIOCLETIAN. I do not understand that—and what I do not understand, I distrust. I distrust these Christians. Why have they no temple to their God among the many temples of Rome—a temple with its own altar and image? That I could understand.

[*He grips the arms of his chair. His excitement is growing.*]

GEORGE. Cæsar, the God of Israel dwells not in temples made with hands. His temple is in the hearts of those that love and serve Him; such a temple is not easy to destroy.

DIOCLETIAN. But I will destroy it, and all that follow it—

burn them, cut them down like the foul weeds they are, crush them . . .

GEORGE. And by the same token, Cæsar, they will surely live. Burn them, and they grow again. Cut them down, and they spring again from the roots. Crush them, and you do but drive them underground.

DIOCLETIAN [*shouting*]. Enough ! [*Quiet again, but angry*] I commend your frankness, but you will do well to carry it no farther. You have said enough. In another it might well have been too much. Too much, you understand ?

GEORGE. I understand, Cæsar.

DIOCLETIAN [*smoothly*]. Then we may begin again. I had thought to make you governor of ten cities. Could you undertake so much ?

GEORGE. Cæsar, I could not.

DIOCLETIAN. You are too modest. Why not ?

GEORGE. Have I not already given reason enough, Cæsar ?

DIOCLETIAN [*more dangerously smoothly*]. Yes ? Then your reason passed me by, or I chose not to hear it.

GEORGE. Cæsar, I am a Christian.

DIOCLETIAN [*breaking out*]. Again ? You tell me so to my face ? Did I not say that I chose not to hear ? Did I not show, so that even the blindest fool could see, that the subject was at an end ? Yet you say to me, to *me*, "I am a Christian." Take care. You go too far. You forget yourself.

GEORGE. No, Cæsar ; I remember myself.

DIOCLETIAN. Be silent. You are no Christian. [*Quiet again, but raging*] My command has gone out, there is no Christian under the arms of Rome.

GEORGE [*louder*]. Then, Cæsar, I am no more under the arms of Rome ; for a Christian I am, and a Christian I must be.

DIOCLETIAN [*rising, deadly quiet*]. So ! . . . You are under arrest. [*Suddenly mad because no one moves, bawling*] Take him ! Take him, do you hear ? You—you—what's your name ?—Claudius—just now you had something to say. Now you have something to do. [*Quieter*] Take him. [*But CLAUDIUS makes a gesture as if he were going to implore mercy, and he is off again*] Take him, do you hear ? [*CLAUDIUS takes GEORGE'S downstage wrist and puts the other hand on that shoulder, standing behind him. This seems to appease DIOCLETIAN for a moment, and he speaks quietly. But soon the boggy of his fears has him again, and he works up to a rant.*] I will not have these Christians. I will not have them, praying secretly to their secret God in His secret temple, working against me in secret—and, when they are smoked out, defying me with their meekness. I will crush them—crush them. I, Cæsar, have said it. [*He moves to the centre door.*] And you—you a Christian ! We shall see what the torture will do. Take him away.

[*And he goes raging out of sight, still shouting :* Take him away ! Take him away !

[*There is a moment's pause, no one moving. The GUARDS move smartly off after DIOCLETIAN. Then, at a moderate pace, with the two friends still not moving, but slightly turned to the Emperor's exit,*

CURTAIN

SCENE V

A cell. GEORGE, very white, is lying on a rough couch, his wrists and ankles lightly manacled. Near him on the floor is a pitcher of water. A GUARD (if any) stands at the entry. After a moment's pause, during which he lies in utter exhaustion,

GEORGE *raises himself painfully on one elbow and slowly reaches for the pitcher. CLAUDIUS is heard approaching. He appears at the door just as GEORGE gives up the struggle and falls back with a faint groan. He signs the GUARD away and comes down quietly.*

CLAUDIUS. What is it ?

GEORGE. Claudius ! You !

CLAUDIUS. Hush. Lie still. I bribed the guard to let me be with you till—just these few minutes.

GEORGE. You are a good friend, Claudius.

CLAUDIUS. Rubbish ! What was it you were wanting ?

GEORGE. Water. It must have torn away the muscles of my shoulder—the rack. I can't lift the pitcher.

CLAUDIUS. The beasts ! [*Lifting the pitcher*] I'll help you up. Gently now. . . . [*After GEORGE has drunk and is down again*] There. Is that better ?

GEORGE. Yes. . . . Claudius, I am glad you came, but you should have left me. In a way it would have been . . . easier.

CLAUDIUS. Don't talk so much. Drink some more.

[*He helps him again with extraordinary gentleness.*

GEORGE. Oh, Claudius !—the spirit is willing, but the flesh is very weak.

[*That is too much for CLAUDIUS. He moves sharply to the other side. A pause.*

[*Without movement*] Who is that ?

CLAUDIUS. Where ?

GEORGE. Coming.

CLAUDIUS. I hear nothing.

[*GEORGE lies still. CLAUDIUS turns to look at the door. Suddenly, silently, he whips up to it just in time to stop VALERIUS from coming down. He speaks in a fierce undertone.*

What do you want ? This is no place for you, now.

VALERIUS [*begging quietly*]. I had to see him. Claudius, I won't . . .

GEORGE. Is that Valerius? Let him stay, Claudius.

CLAUDIUS [*letting him go and stepping aside, left of door, irritably*]. Oh, very well, but . . .

[VALERIUS *moves quickly round the foot of the couch and drops on one knee.*

GEORGE. I am glad you came, Valerius. I wanted to say good-bye.

VALERIUS [*in a swift excited undertone*]. Not good-bye. . . . George—there is still time. You mustn't die. Listen: you need not change at all—not in your heart. They don't really care what you believe. It is only what you say. George—all you have to do is to say you deny Christ—just say it, George, that is all, and then . . .

GEORGE. Valerius . . . would you do that? . . . Would you, Valerius? . . . Valerius, Christ is King.

[*With a cry VALERIUS sinks back, covering his face with his forearm.* CLAUDIUS, *unable to bear any more of it, comes swiftly round the foot of the couch and puts a hand on his shoulder.*

CLAUDIUS. Come away, Valerius.

[CLAUDIUS *gets him up by the door, and then lets go at him in the same fierce undertone.*

Need you have said that? Do you think he *would*, just to save his body, even if it were worth saving, as it is—now? Deny Christ?—*he* deny Christ?—a few minutes before they execute him? Where's your imagination? Isn't it hard enough for him as it is, without you and your confounded chatter?

VALERIUS [*wretchedly*]. Oh, let me alone, Claudius. . . . Claudius, I can't bear it. If only I could *do* something!

CLAUDIUS. You can.

VALERIUS. What?

CLAUDIUS. Keep quiet.

GEORGE. Claudius.

CLAUDIUS [*to VALERIUS, signing to the passage at the door*].
Wait out there. [*Coming down to GEORGE*] Yes?

GEORGE. Claudius . . . he is so—so young. Don't let any harm come to him, Claudius. Take care of him.

CLAUDIUS. Me? I'm a fine one for taking care of him!

GEORGE. Yes. None better. . . . It must be nearly time, isn't it?

CLAUDIUS. Yes, nearly, now.

GEORGE. The bell will sound soon. . . . You won't go, Claudius, will you? I seem stronger when you are by. You help, Claudius.

CLAUDIUS. I don't see how—an old pagan like me. . . .

[*A deep bell begins to sound, and continues till further note.*]

GEORGE. There it is.

VALERIUS [*horrified, to himself*]. The bell!

[*The sound seems to have given GEORGE a new courage and energy, though his body is as useless as ever. He speaks in quite a new way.*]

GEORGE. Claudius. I don't want them to have to fetch me, not here. I want to get to that door, at least. The outer door, if I can. If I could only stand up. . . .

[*He begins to try, CLAUDIUS standing above him and wisely refraining from helping.*]

VALERIUS. George! Let me . . .

CLAUDIUS [*fiercely quiet, barring his way*]. Will you keep out of this?—keep out and stay out? [*Quelled, VALERIUS backs to his former place. By this time GEORGE has managed to stand. He faces audience. CLAUDIUS comes round the end of the couch to his help.*] Well done, old friend! Easily now. Put some weight on my arm.

GEORGE. Just to get . . . to the door. Once I can get . . . to the door.

[They move slowly up. VALERIUS comes down and stands a little away left. He understands at last that CLAUDIUS can help more than he can. At last they reach the door.]

CLAUDIUS. Bravely done !

GEORGE. Don't move yet. Not just yet. *[He breathes several times.]* You can take your arm away now. *[Carefully he turns to the way by which the others first came on.]* Good-bye. . . . Lord, I believe. Help thou my . . . unbelief.

[Then slowly, but with dignity, he passes out of sight.]

VALERIUS, overcome, comes down stage, left. CLAUDIUS looks along passage as if watching GEORGE'S back.

CLAUDIUS. He has reached the door. They are opening it.

[The bell grows louder, and words of command are heard.]

These are then cut down, with the bell, by closing a door. This seems to jerk VALERIUS awake, and he turns up stage in a state of painful excitement.

VALERIUS. I am going out.

CLAUDIUS *[turning with such determination that VALERIUS stops]*. You'll stay here.

VALERIUS. I shall not. Why should I ?

CLAUDIUS. Why ?—because he told me to take care of you, that's why.

[VALERIUS moves up with determination. CLAUDIUS springs down, catches him by the wrists, and forces him down towards left.]

Stand still, can't you ? . . . Listen.

VALERIUS. The bell has stopped !

CLAUDIUS. Yes.

VALERIUS. Let me go. Let me go, will you !

CLAUDIUS. No. Move, and I'll break your arms. Be quiet. Listen.

[After a slight pause there is a single stroke on the bell. CLAUDIUS lets VALERIUS's hands drop. All the strength has gone out of the young man now GEORGE is dead. He just covers his face while CLAUDIUS moves up on to the steps and stands there like a statue. VALERIUS presently begins to speak, weakly at first, but with such excitement later that he does not care who hears him.]

VALERIUS. Oh God, why did you let him die? Why did you let him die? What's the use of his dying? What is the use of him, now? He could have done so much more, living. He ought to have lived until all the world knew . . . what I know . . . now. *[He turns and shouts hysterically]* Christ is King! Christ is . . .

[He is stopped by CLAUDIUS, who springs down, terrified, claps a hand over his mouth and forces him down to his knees.]

CLAUDIUS. Be quiet, you fool! Do you want them to hear you, out there? Get into trouble if you must, but don't drag me in as evidence. What good do you think you are doing *him* by your screaming? You don't know what you are saying.

VALERIUS. I do. I do, Claudius. I didn't, but I do now. Christ is King, Claudius.

[It is CLAUDIUS who is losing his nerve now. He feels himself being helplessly drawn on a way he does not want to go. Before VALERIUS can finish he claps his hands over his ears and makes for the door.]

CLAUDIUS. Don't say it. Be quiet, will you? I won't stay here. I didn't hear you. Do you understand?—I wasn't here. I didn't hear what you said. If they say to you . . .

VALERIUS *[as if to himself]*. An hour ago, just a little hour ago, he had all life before him. And now the story is—ended.

[The idea seems to shock CLAUDIUS out of his panic. He repeats the word, and then comes down almost slowly, and stands looking down at VALERIUS.]

CLAUDIUS. Ended? . . . His story ended? You don't know what you are saying. His story is hardly begun.

VALERIUS *[simply, looking up at him]*. Claudius, what do you mean?

CLAUDIUS *[quite quietly, towards audience]*. I mean . . . this day Cæsar has destroyed his own image, and a new faith has taken root in its place. He may be the first, but many will follow after. . . . What was it he said?—"By the same token, Cæsar, they will surely live. Crush them, and you do but drive them underground. Burn them, and they grow again. Cut them down, and they spring again from the roots." . . . It was my friend said that. My friend . . . *[With sudden excitement]*—he was my friend, Valerius. *[He runs to the steps and speaks loudly]* He was my friend. *[Then all the excitement drops from him, and he repeats like a child]* Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief. *[And then, raising his arms, cries out splendidly, for all to hear]* Christ is King! Christ is King!

CURTAIN

THE QUEEN AND MR SHAKESPEARE

A COMEDY

by
David Scott Daniell

CHARACTERS

SIMON, *a kindly, rather humble servant, devoted to, but nervous of, his employer—Master William Shakespeare.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *aged 36. Dressed as in the Droeshout engraving if possible. He is a cultured, sensitive man of quiet moods.*

SIR ROBERT CECIL, *about the same age as William Shakespeare. Slightly pompous and very dignified. His costume is of the court: short cloak, beautiful sword, gloves, etc.*

QUEEN ELIZABETH, *who is near the end of her days, although old, is vigorous. She is dressed in traditional magnificence. At first she is veiled. Her voice should be shrill and commanding, but she has the wits to appreciate intelligence and good humour. She is in a good mood but her steely Tudor arrogance will peep through.*

This play was first produced by Bertha Waddell
at the Children's Theatre in 1941 with the
following cast :

| | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| <i>Simon</i> | . | . | . | . | THOMAS MERCER |
| <i>William Shakespeare</i> | . | . | . | . | JAMES GIBSON |
| <i>Sir Robert Cecil</i> | . | . | . | . | GRAHAM SQUIRE |
| <i>Queen Elizabeth</i> | . | . | . | . | BERTHA WADDELL |

DAVID SCOTT DANIELL, now serving with the Royal Engineers, is the author of three novels : *Morning at Seven*, *Young English*, and *The Time of Singing*.

He has written many radio plays, particularly for school broadcasts, and *The Queen and Mr Shakespeare* has been broadcast twice in The Children's Hour.

This little play is not history. It is not based on fact, nor even on probabilities. But it is possible. There is a certain proportion of fact in it, and the rest is made up of authenticated legends and fiction. For example, William Shakespeare was lodging in London at the time of the play ; he was working on *Hamlet* and there is a pleasant legend that Queen Elizabeth did invite him to write a new play about the fat knight. Moreover, the grant of arms was made about this time, and to the poet's father, a discredited provincial business man.

So it is with the rest of the play. It is a story, but it might have happened, or shall we say, it could have happened. Perhaps it did, perhaps it did not. But after all, "the play's the thing."

THE QUEEN AND MR SHAKESPEARE ¹

TIME : *An afternoon in early summer, 1600.*

SCENE : *The principal room in Mr William Shakespeare's lodgings on Bankside, London. It is on the first floor. There is a long casement window at the back, overlooking the Thames, and the audience might be able to see the roofs and spires, all higgledy-piggledy, of old London in the distance, mounting upward.*

Under the window is a stout oak table, of the refectory type. At one end of the table there is a chair on which WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE sits, writing. There are quills in front of him and two ink-horns. A pile of paper, and many sheets, written on, are scattered on the table and some have overflowed on to the floor. One has fallen down behind the table. He cannot see it; the audience can.

For the rest, furnish it as is convenient: fireplace in the left wall, and a door between it and the audience; another door in the opposite wall. The first door leads from the street entrance, the second to SHAKESPEARE'S bedroom. There is a chest, with large books on it, folios, and family-bible type of books; two or three stolid chairs or benches; one chair by the fire, with a small table near it. On this are a jar and some pipes, long clay "churchwardens." On the wall opposite to the fireplace is a corner-piece with a curtain in front of it, a hanging wardrobe, large enough to hold cloaks and swords—and large enough for a lady wearing a farthingale to hide behind.

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Miss Bertha Waddell, The Children's Theatre, Caldergrove House, Hallside, Lanarkshire.

For atmosphere: a sword and belt behind the bedroom door, a plumed hat if possible on a stool, and two tankards and a bottle of wine.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE is writing hard. He is absorbed in his work, and writes in spasms. Sometimes he looks out of the window, sometimes he speaks a phrase to himself, moving his left hand as though he is feeling its weight in his hand. At other times he rumples his hair. Hold this long enough for the audience to get used to him. He finishes a page, pushes it aside quickly, and continues.

Enter SIMON. He knocks at the door once or twice first, but W. S. takes no notice, so he comes in, peering round, and then, sidling in, stands down stage looking at his master.

SIMON. Master ! [No notice taken of him. He coughs.]

Master ! [Very bravely, and very loud] MASTER !

SHAKESPEARE [without looking up]. Go away. . . .

SIMON [not giving in, though he would like to]. Master . . .

SHAKESPEARE [to himself; he has been hovering over a phrase, gets it, and writes rapidly; then, speaking as he writes]. Go away, Simon ! [He tries to work on.

SIMON. But, master . . .

SHAKESPEARE [throwing his quill across the room in a fit of spleen and crumpling up the page he has been writing]. Simon, you oaf. . . . Have I not told you a thousand times that when I am working I will—not—be—disturbed ?

[He advances towards SIMON as he speaks, as though to strangle him.

SIMON [speaking quickly as he backs away]. I know, your honour, you must not be disturbed when you are writing. [He rubs the top of his head thoughtfully.] I understand that, master, but Master Ben Jonson's boy has called, master, and . . .

SHAKESPEARE [standing over him, and holding his hand now

that he has heard the name of his friend Ben Jonson]. Well . . . go on . . . You've ruined the second act for me . . . Go on . . .

SIMON. Master Ben Jonson's boy says, Can Master William Shakespeare come to the Mermaid for dinner?

SHAKESPEARE [*grimly*]. And what did you say, mutton-head?

SIMON. I said . . . I said that I'd ask you, master.

SHAKESPEARE. And what is the line I made you learn when you came to me ten years ago, and which I have made you repeat ten thousand times . . . eh? . . . eh?

[*He raises his hands to strangle him.*]

SIMON [*meekly*]. When you are writing you are not to be disturbed, master.

SHAKESPEARE [*chastising him with a tankard he picks up, or a book, or the flat of a sword*]. OAF . . . FOOL . . . MUTTON-PATE . . . YET YOU TELL ME . . . MASTER BEN JONSON WANTS ME . . . TO GO . . . OUT TO DINNER . . .

SIMON [*quickly and bravely*]. Yes, master, but you write, write, write all day and night and act all afternoon . . . a little roystering would do you good, master . . .

SHAKESPEARE [*desisting. Charming, quizzically, looking at him*]. Poor old mutton-pate. "Do me good!" Your heart's in the right place—but your poor old brain! [*He touches his head and SIMON shakes his, mournfully.*] Tell Master Ben Jonson's boy that Master Shakespeare has work to do and cannot waste his time roystering. When this play is finished . . . perhaps. Now begone . . .

SIMON. Yes, master.

SHAKESPEARE [*to him when he is at the door*]. Simon!

SIMON. Master?

SHAKESPEARE [*very sweetly*]. If anyone calls to see me, what will you say?

SIMON [*ticking off his fingers*]. If it be a lady of quality : " Master William Shakespeare is out, mistress " [*bowing*]. If it be a gentleman : " Master William Shakespeare is not at home, your honour." If it be an actor : " My master is busy, and will see no one ! "

SHAKESPEARE. Good. Now, away with you, AND LEAVE ME ALONE.

SIMON. Yes, master.

[*Exit SIMON.*]

[SHAKESPEARE *looks after him, laughs lightly, and returns eagerly to his desk. For the next few minutes he tries to recover his line of work, and to concentrate in the midst of the following interruptions.*

First there is a resolute knocking at the street door. SHAKESPEARE obviously keeps himself from noticing it. Then the knocking is repeated, and he shows anger, then interest, and again tries to ignore it. This can be handled as the producer thinks best. Then SHAKESPEARE can stand it no longer. A man's voice calls " Holla, there " from the street.

SHAKESPEARE [*shouting*]. Simon ! SIMON !

[*The knocking continues.*]

SIMON [*off stage*]. Coming, master ! Coming ! [*He enters, breathless and anxious.*] Here I am, master.

SHAKESPEARE [*ironically, gently*]. Are you deaf, Simon ?

SIMON. Oh, that ! Yes, master, I hear that, but I thought that if I took no notice he would go away.

SHAKESPEARE. Go to the window, chicken-head, and see who it is.

SIMON. Yes, master.

[*He goes to window and peers down.*]

SHAKESPEARE. Well ?

SIMON. 'Tis a gentleman, master, and a gentleman of quality too ; a most resplendent gentleman, and a lady.

SHAKESPEARE. Go, Simon, and tell them that your master is out, away, in the Low Countries, anywhere but here, and . . . GET RID OF THEM. Be polite, they may be patrons ; but now, I must be left alone. Do you understand ?

SIMON. Yes, master.

SHAKESPEARE. Then go !

[He makes a sign as though causing SIMON to vanish by magic. He stands listening.]

[We hear the door opening, and then SHAKESPEARE smiles as he listens to SIMON speaking to them. In case it can be heard by the audience SIMON says :

SIMON *[off stage]*. My master regrets, your honour, that he is away on business. He will not be back until very late.

CALLER. Then we will come in and await him.

[The smile on SHAKESPEARE's face fades as he hears the visitors coming in, and a look of alarm takes the place of the smile. As the visitors come nearer, SHAKESPEARE looks round, then makes up his mind, seizes papers and ink and quills, leaving two, and goes out by the other door. He just leaves as they come in. This is the conversation as they approach. . . .]

MAN'S VOICE. I tell you we are resolved to enter and to await his return.

SIMON. But my master is out, your honour, I assure you of that !

MAN'S VOICE. So you have told us ! We will do no harm. Get out of the way, oaf !

SIMON. Oh dear ! You do not know the quickness of my master's temper, he is not an easy man . . .

[Enter, to an empty stage, SIMON, backward, SIR ROBERT CECIL, and a veiled lady. SIMON looks round as he comes in, stops in surprise, looks at the far door, and understands the situation. He is relieved.]

SIMON. There you are, your honour, he is not here !

CECIL. You seem surprised !

SIMON. Oh no, your honour, I told you he was out.

LADY [*with a sharp voice which SIMON obeys at once, after jerking with astonishment*]. Leave us . . . go, fool.

SIMON [*looking from one to the other*]. Yes, your honours, very well . . . only . . . [*He goes, shaking his head.*]

LADY [*sinking into a chair, centre, and looking round her*]. Phew ! An honest watch-dog, Cecil, but a tiresome one. Lord, how he yapped.

CECIL. It was most regrettable, your Grace, especially as we do not want this visit to attract any attention. I protest once more, Ma'am, that it is most impolitic ; your Majesty's visiting a mere actor !

THE QUEEN. Tush, man ! Master Shakespeare is more than an actor. He writes very well. Very well indeed. I am intrigued by the man. If I have a whim to beard him in his den, then beard him I will.

CECIL. But you could have summoned him to Court, your Majesty.

THE QUEEN. Oh no. He is a man of parts, Cecil, and I want to meet him on his own ground, where he will not be alarmed by strange surroundings. [*Looking round her*] A comfortable lodging. Tell me about him. Where does he come from ; of what parentage ? All you could discover.

CECIL. He comes from a small market town in Warwickshire, your Majesty, Stratford-upon-Avon . . . His father is a tradesman, a butcher, glove-maker, and so on, and until recently he was of some standing in the town ; quite prosperous, in fact. But he has lately fallen on lean times. Master William Shakespeare is in the habit of visiting his home every year. He has a wife, and two daughters ; his only son, Hamnet, died four years ago at the age of eleven.

THE QUEEN. Married, eh? Anything else?

CECIL. He appears to have come to London as a young man of twenty-one to seek his fortune as a poet. He became an actor, displayed a certain skill in improving old plays, and gradually took to writing them himself. Since 1592, in the last eight years, that is . . .

THE QUEEN. I can subtract eight from 1600. Go on . . .

CECIL. Yes, your Majesty; in the last eight years he has published two books of poems, and has written twenty plays, among them *Julius Caesar*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *King Henry V*. For the rest he is industrious, a moderate actor, and well liked. That is all I have been able to discover, Ma'am. But I would suggest that it would be wiser for us to leave discreetly before . . .

THE QUEEN. Peace! Enough of that.

[She gets up and walks round the room. She raises the curtain of the corner-cupboard and looks inside, examines the books, and strolls to the table. Meanwhile CECIL inspects the pipes, with interest and fastidiousness. The QUEEN sees the page of newly written manuscript on the floor.]

THE QUEEN. That paper . . . get it for me, Cecil.

CECIL. Yes, your Majesty. *[He drops down and retrieves the page of the play. He looks at it.]* It would seem to be a part of a play, your Majesty.

THE QUEEN. Very observant of you, Cecil! I can read it myself. *[Takes it from CECIL.]* Ha! ha! this is good; listen to this, Cecil!

[Reading, and puzzling a little over the writing at times, at the actress's discretion.]

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be:
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,

And borrowing takes the edge off husbandry.
This above all : to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man . . . ”

[Reflectively, thinking over the meaning]

“ To thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man . . . ”

There's wisdom in that, Cecil. I would like to make all my gentlemen at the Court learn that passage . . .

“ To thine own self be true . . . ”

CECIL. A good sentiment, doubtless, your Majesty ;— but not, perhaps, very new. It is obvious that . . .

THE QUEEN. 'Tis very new, and the poetry is excellent, better than the flowery froth of the fashionable jackanapes. What play is this ?

CECIL. I don't know, Ma'am, 'tis not yet written !

THE QUEEN. I only hope it isn't about the murder of a king ! Those plays about Richard the Second and Julius Cæsar had too much of royal murder in them. I don't want him to put ideas into my subjects' heads . . .

CECIL *[who has been looking about the desk idly, and has picked up a quill which he examines]*. Madame . . . *[He lowers his voice.]* This quill, the ink is still moist !

THE QUEEN. Oh ? And what does that imply ?

CECIL. That our host was here just before we came in. *[He looks round him, and points at the second door.]* I suspect that he was shy . . . and went in there !

THE QUEEN. Ah ! *[Getting an idea]* Listen, Cecil. In fable and story kings and queens often go abroad in disguise to discover the heart of their people. It pleases me to do the same. I will hide behind that curtain ; you fetch him out, and question him. Ask him what the people think of their

sovereign ; ask him questions which will show us his real thoughts ; it will do me good.

CECIL. And if he speaks treason . . .

[He makes the sign of hanging.]

THE QUEEN. Under no circumstances, . . . unless of course he is very outspoken. But I would not have my Shakespeare's head cut off. *[A new idea strikes her.]* Is he good-looking ?

CECIL. Passably, for the sort of man he is—an actor !

THE QUEEN *[quietly]*. How condescending of you, Cecil ! —Come ! to our game. I'll hide, here. *[She goes behind the curtain and sticks her head out.]* Well, fetch him in, Cecil.

CECIL. It irks me, Ma'am, to see the Queen of England hiding behind a curtain in an actor's lodgings while her Principal Secretary of State plays the spy . . . It is . . . undignified !

THE QUEEN. Fiddlesticks ! To your work.

[She withdraws her head. CECIL swallows, and goes to the door of SHAKESPEARE'S bedroom and opens it.]

CECIL. Good Day to you, Master Shakespeare. . . . I said, GOOD DAY TO YOU, Master Shakespeare. *[To the QUEEN, shaking his head as though w. s. were a mental case]* He is absorbed in his writing, or pretends to be ! *[Very loud]* A pleasant day, Master Shakespeare !

[This works, so he returns to centre stage and sits on the table, nonchalantly, one leg swinging.]

[Enter SHAKESPEARE. He comes in quickly, obviously about to be angry. But at the sight of his very distinguished visitor, he pauses, shows surprise, and then assumes an easy courtesy, which is not, however, subservient.]

SHAKESPEARE. I apologize, Sir Robert Cecil ; I did not know that I had so distinguished a visitor. *[He bows.]*

CECIL. Absorbed in your work, eh? Ah, you poets! But your manservant insisted on my coming in to await your return. [*Slyly*] He was under the impression that you were—out.

SHAKESPEARE. Foolish of him. But in what way can I be of service to your honour? I trust that you do not call on matters of State? By your leave.

[*He sits down, astride a stool, facing CECIL.*]

CECIL. No, not on affairs of State. It is really an idle call, yet not without a purpose. Your plays are very popular, Master Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE. It is good of you to say so. Sometimes we have more success than others of course. But proceed.

[*The QUEEN puts her head out and signs to CECIL to get to business.*]

CECIL. As I said, your plays are successful; you seem to understand the people of London; one might say you have the key to their minds, or even their hearts. . . . [SHAKESPEARE *bows*. *The QUEEN is impatient.*] So, I thought that perhaps we might talk . . . in confidence . . .

SHAKESPEARE. Talk . . . of what matters, Sir Robert?

CECIL. Oh, of general matters—the temper of the people, the popularity of the Queen, perhaps.

SHAKESPEARE. I find it healthier, Sir Robert, not to discuss affairs of State, even with my closest friends, and never with such high officials as yourself. [*He caresses his neck.*] One feels . . . safer.

CECIL. Oh, come, Master Shakespeare, I assure you that not one word that you say shall go beyond these four walls. Come, let us be frank with each other. What does your ordinary Englishman, whom you seem to know and understand so well, think of the government—and of the Queen?

[*The QUEEN is so interested that she pokes her head out to hear his answer.*

SHAKESPEARE [*he is restless and is controlling his irritation out of respect for his distinguished visitor*]. Has not your honour his own agents to collect such information? Really, sir, I would esteem it a great favour if you would permit me to continue with my work.

CECIL [*amused*]. I am not accustomed to having my company valued so lightly! Come, Master Shakespeare, it is your opinion I require.

SHAKESPEARE [*his reserve breaking down. He gets up and speaks vehemently, and very loudly*]. Oh, THE DEVIL TAKE THE GOVERNMENT, AND YOU, MASTER SECRETARY OF STATE, AND THE QUEEN! Can't you LEAVE ME ALONE?

[*CECIL falls back a pace or two, startled. The QUEEN emerges from her hiding-place, and SHAKESPEARE stands amazed, and aghast. She sails up to him. When he recovers his senses he drops on one knee.*

THE QUEEN. Indeed!

SHAKESPEARE. Your Majesty . . . I . . . I did not know . . .

THE QUEEN [*not as fierce as she might be; she likes him*]. "The Devil take the Government! And you, Master Secretary of State, and the QUEEN!!!" Master Shakespeare!

SHAKESPEARE. Your Grace . . . I was not master of myself . . . I am working hard on a play . . . and . . .

THE QUEEN. Come, [*giving him her hand*] you are forgiven. I hoped to hear flattery—behind my back. Cecil bungled it . . .

CECIL. Madame, I . . .

THE QUEEN. Silent, Cecil. Sit down and leave us alone. Over there . . . [*CECIL sits.*] I will sit here, Master Shake-

spear, and you—there. I expect you wonder at this visit ?

SHAKESPEARE. Madame, I am overcome . . . the honour . . .

THE QUEEN. Tush, man, no flowery speeches ! Save those for your plays . . .

SHAKESPEARE [*quickly*]. I do not write "flowery speeches," your Majesty.

THE QUEEN. Oh la la ! How quick we are ! But I must explain my visit. I was at the theatre the other day, unknown to you, the actors, or the audience. It was . . . what was it, Cecil ?

CECIL [*he is in a huff*]. *As You Like It*, Madame.

THE QUEEN. That was it. I did.

SHAKESPEARE. You did . . . ?

THE QUEEN. Like it. Very charming.

SHAKESPEARE. I am honoured, Madame.

THE QUEEN [*irritably, to CECIL*]. Stop staring at us like that, Cecil. Smoke one of Master Shakespeare's pipes of tobacco.

CECIL [*very haughtily*]. I do not take the tobacco, Madame.

THE QUEEN. Then begin. Raleigh does, and Drake did, and so do many gentlemen of note. Go on ; try. Show him, Master Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE. Certainly, Madame. Allow me, sir. [*Goes over to CECIL and takes a pipe and fills it as he talks. The QUEEN watches.*] You take the tobacco leaf thus, sir, and put it in the bowl of the pipe, so. Flint and steel, so. [*Actor uses flint and steel, with a cigarette lighter in his hand.*] Light the rush so, and then with a taper, light the tobacco. You draw the smoke into your mouth, so . . .

[*CECIL does and coughs violently.*]

SHAKESPEARE. You will become accustomed to it in a moment.

[*CECIL continues smoking, distastefully.*]

THE QUEEN. Leave him alone now ; he can practise the art while we talk. Extraordinary idea, that. They tell me the savages in the New World smoke the tobacco a great deal. Ah well, how the world goes on ! But sit down, Master Shakespeare. As I was saying, I admire your plays, and I wished to meet you. I could have summoned you to Court, but the other actors and writers would have been jealous and we couldn't fill the Court with such people, could we ?

SHAKESPEARE [*with some irony*]. No, Madame, of course not.

THE QUEEN [*She looks at CECIL, who has laid the pipe down and who holds his head. But catching her eye, and perhaps with a cough from her, he takes it up again. To SHAKESPEARE*]. So I decided to visit you, unexpected and quite secretly. I charge you on your honour to say nothing of this rather indiscreet adventure of mine.

SHAKESPEARE. Assuredly, your Majesty. I only wish that I had known, that I could have received your Grace in a more befitting manner.

THE QUEEN. Tush, that is of no moment. [*Change of tone, ingratiating*] Now, tell me about your plays ? What are you writing at present ?

SHAKESPEARE. The tragedy of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, your Grace.

THE QUEEN. Tragedy, eh ? No murders in it, I hope ?

SHAKESPEARE. Well . . . as a matter of fact, your Majesty, there are several. The play consists of the efforts of the young Prince Hamlet to avenge his father's murder.

THE QUEEN. Was his father a king, then ?

SHAKESPEARE. He was, Madame—of Denmark.

THE QUEEN [*disapproving*]. I'm not so sure that I like too many royal murders in plays. Look at that Roman play of yours . . . what did you call it ?

SHAKESPEARE. *Julius Cæsar*, Madame.

THE QUEEN. That was the one ; I remember a fine speech in it—" Friends, Romans, countrymen, listen to me . . ."

SHAKESPEARE. ". . . lend me your ears . . .," Madame . . .

THE QUEEN. ". . . Lend me your ears,

I come to bury Cæsar, not to tell you all about him."

SHAKESPEARE. ". . . praise him . . ."

THE QUEEN. Well, whatever it is, as I was saying before you interrupted me, that play had a most gruesome murder, and if you're going to keep on writing plays about the murder of kings it might put ideas into the heads of some of my own subjects . . .

SHAKESPEARE. That, Madame, would be impossible, for you are enthroned in their hearts and . . .

THE QUEEN. Stay ! Don't start playing the courtier ! But remember, not too many royal murders in this new play. I know some of it, [*archly*] and very charming it is too.

SHAKESPEARE. Know some of it, Madame ! Impossible !

THE QUEEN. But I do !

SHAKESPEARE. I protest, Madame, that no one but myself . . .

THE QUEEN [*reciting rather well, and very archly* ; SHAKESPEARE *displays natural amazement*].

" Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing takes the edge off husbandry . . ."

SHAKESPEARE. No, no, no ! You ruin the lines . . . " and borrowing *dulls* the edge of husbandry . . ."

THE QUEEN. I assure you 'tis not so ! 'Tis—" And borrowing *takes the edge off* husbandry . . ."

SHAKESPEARE [*forgetting himself*]. A vile phrase !

THE QUEEN [*roused*]. But so you wrote it . . . " and borrowing *takes the edge off* husbandry "

SHAKESPEARE. Never would I write so lame a phrase, 'Tis "*dulls* the edge of husbandry," I wrote it !

THE QUEEN. This is unbearable ! I tell you you wrote, "*Takes the edge off* husbandry."

SHAKESPEARE. This is too much ! Once and for all, I say I wrote, "*Dulls the edge of husbandry.*"

THE QUEEN. Never have I met with such obstinacy. [*Playing a trump card*] But we will see, and you will admit that you are wrong.

[*She takes the page of Hamlet from a fold in her dress.*

SHAKESPEARE [*taking a stand and folding his arms*]. "*Dulls the edge of husbandry.*" Where did you get that page ?

THE QUEEN [*nonchalantly*]. Under the table—there ! Come and see, obstinate man !

[*He goes over and puts his arm round her shoulders, the better to see. CECIL, very miserable, head hanging down, feeling very sick, is roused and sits up in horror. They don't notice him.*

THE QUEEN. There ! "*And borrowing takes the edge off* husbandry." Now, Master Pig-head !

SHAKESPEARE. A vile phrase, as I said. Give it to me . . . It should be "*Dulls the edge of husbandry.*"

[*He goes to the table, takes quill and dips it in another ink-horn which was left behind, and alters the line, trying it over with a moving hand first. He ignores the QUEEN, who looks at CECIL, woebegone and ill, and laughs.*

[SHAKESPEARE returns to the QUEEN.

THE QUEEN [*holding out her hand*]. Let me read the rest of the page.

SHAKESPEARE. Oh no. Not until it is finished. [*Bitterly*] "*Takes the edge off* husbandry." Pschaw !

THE QUEEN. Well you wrote it ! [*Like a naughty child to*

a confederate] Look at the Principal Secretary of State of England, the President of the Council !

[SHAKESPEARE *looks at him and grins.*

SHAKESPEARE. 'Tis the tobacco. It is ever thus at first. [Goes over to him] How now, Master Secretary ? [Slaps him on the back. CECIL winces and shows great distress.] Come, a draught of sack !

[SHAKESPEARE *takes pot and pours out a tankard.* CECIL *shakes his head.*

SHAKESPEARE. Come, drink, man, 'twill make you better . . . come, drink . . .

[CECIL *drinks, looks round in horror, and then dashes across the room to SHAKESPEARE'S bedroom.*

[The QUEEN and SHAKESPEARE *watch him and laugh.*

SHAKESPEARE [*shouting and opening main door*]. Simon ! Simon !

SIMON. Coming, master . . . [Enters, anxious and breathless] Yes, master ?

SHAKESPEARE. Go into my bedroom and tend her Majesty's Secretary of State . . . he is . . . unwell . . .

SIMON. Her Majesty's . . . Secretary . . .

[He is dazed, but has not seen the QUEEN yet.

SHAKESPEARE. Yes. Go on.

[He pushes SIMON towards the other door. SIMON begins to go and then sees the QUEEN. He stops dead, mouth agape, and blinks.

SHAKESPEARE. Confound the man, are you struck lunatic ?

SIMON [*pointing, incredible*]. S'the Queen . . . the . . . Qu . . . qu . . . queen !

THE QUEEN. It is, my man.

SIMON. The Queen . . . here . . . lawks a-mercy me ! [He drops on his knees.] God Save your Grace, . . . and may I be forgiven . . . I'm only poor Simon . . . I don't mean no harm. . . .

THE QUEEN. And you've done no harm, I hope. Come, get up and go tend my good Sir Robert Cecil . . .

SIMON [*getting up with great speed and shuffling off backward, bumping into something perhaps, gazing pop-eyed at the QUEEN*]. Yes, your Majesty . . . Yes, indeed. . . . [Goes.]

THE QUEEN. Well !

SHAKESPEARE. A good servant, Madame, but rather simple.

THE QUEEN. D'you know, Master Shakespeare, you've given me a rare treat. I'm grateful to you.

SHAKESPEARE. Grateful, Madame ?

THE QUEEN. Mm-nm. You quarrelled with me, and I quarrelled with you, openly and noisily. No one ever quarrels with me, except my worthy House of Commons.

SHAKESPEARE [*remembering things*]. I hope . . . er . . . that your Majesty will pardon me . . . I was . . . carried away by the discussion.

THE QUEEN. Don't spoil it, please. But I must tell you what I want you to do.

SHAKESPEARE. Your servant in all things, your Majesty.

THE QUEEN. And don't be obsequious like my courtiers. I want you to write me a play.

SHAKESPEARE [*not so sure of this*]. Oh !

THE QUEEN. You remember your nice fat knight, Sir John What's-his-name ?

SHAKESPEARE. Falstaff ?

THE QUEEN. Falstaff, that's it. I loved him. I want you to write a play about him for me !

SHAKESPEARE. But, Madame, he has been in three plays of mine already, and once, in *Henry V*, he died !

THE QUEEN. Yes, but you brought him to life again for *King Henry VI* ! So he can live yet again. He's such a merry gentleman, and I want to see more of him. How many plays have you written ?

SHAKESPEARE. Mmmm. Twenty-two, Madame.

THE QUEEN. Then write one for me !

SHAKESPEARE. I have two acts of *Hamlet* to write yet, Madame ! And *Hamlet* is a play which is taking a great deal of my time.

THE QUEEN. Tush, finish it off quickly, or put it aside.

SHAKESPEARE. Has your Majesty ever tried to write a play ?

THE QUEEN. *Me ?* Of course not !

SHAKESPEARE. I thought not. Madame, in all things I am your most obedient servant, except in my own art, and I consider myself the best judge of writing my own plays !

THE QUEEN [*drawing herself up, becoming the QUEEN for the first time*]. Hard words, sirrah ! Remember whom you are speaking to. WE COMMAND YOU TO OBEY US !

SHAKESPEARE [*in a white-hot fury*]. You may command, Madame, but . . .

THE QUEEN [*stamping up and down and muttering in Royal Tudor wrath*]. Such words . . . to me . . . Elizabeth of England. . . ! [*Suddenly she stops still and controls herself, and becomes her previous holiday self.*] We were forgetting ourselves, Master Shakespeare. I apologize. I am here as a woman and a friend, not as the Queen. Am I forgiven ?

SHAKESPEARE [*not so easily wooed*]. Well . . . it's all very well . . . [*He overcomes his temperament.*] It is I who apologize, Madame. About this play. Sir John Falstaff, you say ?

THE QUEEN. Yes . . . [*Eagerly*] Yes, Falstaff, the fat knight . . . in love !

SHAKESPEARE [*considering*]. Mmm. In love . . . mmm.

THE QUEEN [*excited*]. Yes, in love, and make them all gull him, make a fool of him, while he boasts and wobbles his

huge body through the play. I have a marriage entertainment at Windsor shortly, and we could have the play then. I know, call it *The Merry Wives of Windsor* !

SHAKESPEARE. Yes, that's it ! *Merry Wives of Windsor* . . . and Sir John can hide in a clothes-basket and they can throw him into the Thames . . . I've got it . . . and . . .

[Enter CECIL and SIMON. SIMON edges off the stage and CECIL sits down, pale and limp, but better. He glares at the two of them, talking excitedly together.]

THE QUEEN. Good . . . splendid . . . and no murders, no tragedy . . . plenty of laughs, eh ?

SHAKESPEARE. It shall be done, Madame. When is your entertainment at Windsor ?

THE QUEEN. Let me see . . . a fortnight to-morrow !

SHAKESPEARE [all enthusiasm goes from him, he gets up and grimaces, hopelessly, and looks at the QUEEN as though she were quite mad]. Two weeks ! Two weeks ! And you expect me to write this play in time for production then ?

THE QUEEN. Of course. Why ever not ?

SHAKESPEARE. It can't be done. Impossible. I refuse !

THE QUEEN. REFUSE, Sirrah ? REFUSE . . . ME ?

SHAKESPEARE [snapping it out]. Yes.

[There is a terrible silence.]

CECIL [he coughs]. May I remind your Majesty that Paul's has struck the hour and that the Spanish Ambassador has an audience . . .

THE QUEEN. The Spanish Ambassador can wait. He's used to it. Do you want another pipe of tobacco ?

CECIL [hastily]. Indeed no, Madame . . .

THE QUEEN. Then hold your tongue. [She turns to SHAKESPEARE.] Master Shakespeare. [Gently] Does it take long to write a play ?

SHAKESPEARE. Three months—if I am not interrupted !

THE QUEEN. And you couldn't do it in two weeks? Not a little comedy, for me?

SHAKESPEARE. Certainly not!

THE QUEEN [*cleverly*]. Very well then. I'll ask Master Ben Jonson to do it; I'm sure *he* will.

SHAKESPEARE. Oh!

THE QUEEN [*pleased that things are working out as they are*]. Yes, that's what I'll do. And now I must return to Whitehall. Come along, Cecil. . . .

SHAKESPEARE. But, your Majesty. . . .

THE QUEEN. We'll see what this Spanish Ambassador wants, Cecil. . . . [*They go towards the door.*]

SHAKESPEARE [*watching them*]. Madame. . . I'll do it.

THE QUEEN. But I want it within two weeks!

SHAKESPEARE. You shall have it, Madame, within ten days.

THE QUEEN [*coming back and smiling*]. You're sure you wouldn't rather I told Master Ben Jonson to. . . .

SHAKESPEARE [*bowing*]. I should be honoured, your Grace, with the task. I feel, in all modesty, that I. . . .

THE QUEEN. . . . can write a better play than Master Ben Jonson? I wonder!

CECIL. Madame, the Spanish Ambassador. . . .

THE QUEEN. Bother the Spanish Ambassador! Your hand, Master Shakespeare! [*Falling on one knee, he takes the QUEEN'S hand and kisses it.*] And thank you for a delightful hour. Is there anything I can do for you? You have the right to ask it.

SHAKESPEARE. Only to consider me as your Majesty's most loyal and obedient subject.

THE QUEEN. Fiddle-de-dee! I mean, is there anything you want for yourself?

SHAKESPEARE. No, Madame. . . . But, yes. . . . [*He gets an*

idea.] By your leave . . . [*He rises and goes to the press in the corner and ferrets among many documents, plays, etc., and produces an imposing parchment document, talking as he ferrets.*] You see, Madame, my father is an old man, and a disappointed man. He has lost his self-esteem. He was once the principal citizen of Stratford-on-Avon . . . now he is poor and discredited . . . His pride suffers . . . [*Coming up and handing her the document.*] This, your Majesty, is the record of a service my grandfather had the honour of doing for your Majesty's grandfather, King Henry VII . . .

THE QUEEN. Yes . . . and your request?

SHAKESPEARE. That this be used, Madame, for a grant of arms for my father. He would be happy to be able to bear a coat of arms; to be, indeed, John Shakespeare, Gentleman.

THE QUEEN. So your request is not for yourself after all, but for your father!

SHAKESPEARE. I am fond of him, Madame.

THE QUEEN. It shall be done. Here, Cecil, take this, and see to it. A Grant of Arms for Master John Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon, Gentleman.

CECIL. Very good, your Grace.

THE QUEEN. And the motto, Master Shakespeare? Have you thought of one?

SHAKESPEARE. I have thought of one, Madame,—*Non Sanz Droict* . . .

THE QUEEN [*savouring the words*]. *Non Sanz Droict* . . . Not without right . . . Very good, it shall be as you wish. Remember that, Cecil.

[*They stand down stage centre, she very much the Queen.*]

THE QUEEN. Thank you, Master Shakespeare, for a most instructive and enjoyable hour.

SHAKESPEARE. I shall always treasure the memory of this

visit, Madame. Myself a poor writer of plays, you the greatest queen of all time !

THE QUEEN [*holding out her hand*]. Not a poor writer of plays, Master Shakespeare, but, I think, the greatest poet of all time.

[He drops on to one knee and kisses her hand as the

CURTAIN FALLS

THE DOCTOR FROM DUNMORE

COMEDY IN ONE ACT

by

Thomas Patrick Dillon

and

Nolan Leary

CHARACTERS

MAGGIE RAFFERTY, *a neighbour*

LIZZIE FUREY, *another neighbour*

NORA O'MALLEY, *a bone-setter*

KATIE CLAFFEY, *a neighbour*

DENNIS O'CONNOR, *Mollie's son*

FATHER TIM WHALEN, *a priest*

MAUREEN O'FLAHERTY, *an Island girl*

DR FITZWILLIAMS, *a physician*

MICAL DUV

PADRIC KEARNY

SHAMUS O'LOUGHLIN

} *curraghmen*

SHAUN MOR O'MALLEY, *"The King"*

PLACE : Interior of Mollie O'Connor's cottage,
on the Island of Innisheen, off the west coast of
Ireland.

TIME : The present. An afternoon in summer.

NOLAN LEARY and THOMAS PATRICK DILLON are men of the theatre in every sense of the word.

Nolan Leary was born in Rock Island, Illinois, and as a boy saw his first play on a Mississippi river show-boat. That determined his career.

As an actor he has toured the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand ; and it was while he was serving in the Australian Expeditionary Force in France during the last war that he wrote an all-soldier show which toured for many months and appeared at the Théâtre Albert 1^{er} in Paris. Since then he has written many one-act plays, most of them in collaboration with his wife, and one of his full-length plays was made into the prize-winning motion-picture *Make Way for To-morrow*.

Thomas P. Dillon was born in County Roscommon, Ireland, and, on emigrating to America in 1912, joined the famous Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, and later was a circus performer.

As an actor he has played in every type of production and has toured the United States, Canada, and Mexico ; has appeared in motion pictures, radio, television, and on the Broadway stage in such plays as *Juno and the Paycock*. Like Nolan Leary, he has written a number of successful one-act plays.

Their contribution to this collection has appeared in *The Best One-Act Plays of 1941* in New York.

THE DOCTOR FROM DUNMORE¹

SCENE : *Interior of Irish cottage. Cottage is situated on a cliff, overlooking the sea. Its plain, whitewashed walls are discoloured from smoke of peat-fire. It is poor, but clean. Entrance door (with iron latch) D. S. R., opens outward. A little vessel of holy water hangs on wall just inside door ; over door, a Sacred Heart medallion. Back Wall : small window R. ; door C., opening into bedroom. Left Wall : large turf-burning fireplace where cooking is done on hearth. Iron kettle and pot hang from hooks. Furniture is of the plainest kind. Grey ground cloth.*

When the curtain rises MAGGIE RAFFERTY is looking out through window up R., anxiously watching for something. LIZZIE FUREY sits on a three-legged stool above fireplace L., smoking an old clay pipe and looking into turf fire. Slight pause after rise of curtain. Then door of sick-room up L. C. opens and NORA enters carrying empty drinking-glass. Goes to cupboard C., and fills glass with milk from crock on shelf. Through open bedroom door is seen foot of bed and disarranged bed-clothes. Kneeling beside bed is an old woman saying her beads. At foot of it kneels DENNIS. Also seen is a small table holding a crucifix and an unlighted candle.

LIZZIE. Is she any better, Nora ?

NORA [*pouring milk*]. Ah, she's only middlin', God help her. [*To MAGGIE*] Any sign of them yet ?

¹ The amateur rights of this play are controlled in England by the English Theatre Guild, Ltd., 24 Whitcomb Street, London, W.C.2, to whom applications regarding amateur performances should be made.

MAGGIE. No. The divil a sign.

NORA. Now don't be worryin'. Sure it takes three hours' good rowin' in a curragh to come from the mainland even in daycent weather.

[*She exits into sick-room with milk, quietly closing door.*]

MAGGIE. Them waves 'ud put terror in yer heart at the sight o' them.

[*Turns from window, making the sign of the cross.*]

LIZZIE. Yerra, Maggie, I don't see why they had to send to the mainland for a doctor when Nora in there is better than any doctor that ever set foot on dry land.

MAGGIE [*crossing L. to LIZZIE*]. But didn't the priest say the poor woman might die if she didn't get a doctor? Faith, if you fell off a rock that high, you'd be a corpse for the rest o' yer life.

LIZZIE. Well, ten thousand curses on that ould Dr Fitzwilliams for askin' ten pounds to come. An' him round-shouldered with the weight o' the gold he does be carryin' in his pockets.

MAGGIE [*sitting on chair L.*]. Musha, Lizzie, it's a fearful thing to have to depend on any doctor.

LIZZIE. An' wasn't the doctor the black-hearted ould scoundrel to make us raise the ten pounds before he'd come. The curse o' Cromwell on him !

[*Spits in fire.*]

MAGGIE. Now don't be cursin' him, Lizzie. . . . [*Rises.*] Not till after he gets here anyhow. [*Crosses back to window R.*] God send he makes a safe crossin'.

LIZZIE. An' why wouldn't he? Hasn't he got the three best curraghmen in the west of Ireland rowin' him across !

MAGGIE [*at window R.*]. The divil himself must be kickin' up the ocean the way that west wind is blowin'. An' the dark clouds black'nin' the width of the sea.

LIZZIE. Arrah, you're a terrible woman for worryin',

Maggie Rafferty. Sure they'll be all right. Hasn't every one of them got the St Christopher medal tied 'round their necks?

MAGGIE [*crossing back to L.*]. Did they take a medal for the doctor?

LIZZIE. They did indeed . . . an extra big one. An' sure he'll need it, bad luck to him! [DENNIS O'CONNOR *comes tiptoeing out of his mother's room, closing door softly.*] Is yer mother asleep, Dennis?

DENNIS. She is, thank God. [*Getting his tam o' shanter from hook on wall above door R.*] I'll go up on the cliff and look . . . maybe I can see them from there.

LIZZIE. Do that. An' put yer coat on, avic, or it's destroyed you'll be with the sharp blasts o' that west wind cuttin' through yer bones. [*He takes his coat and puts it on.*] I'll have a nice cup of tay waitin' for ye when ye get back.

[*Door R. opens. FATHER TIM enters. The priest dips his forefinger and thumb in holy-water basin on wall just inside door and makes a small sign of the cross on his forehead with his thumb. The two women rise and make an awkward curtsy. DENNIS removes his tam o' shanter.*]

FATHER TIM. God bless the house.

ALL. You too, Father.

FATHER TIM [*patting boy's shoulder*]. Ah, stop frettin', Dennie avic. Sure yer face is as long as a Palm Sunday gospel. [DENNIS *smiles, puts tam o' shanter on and exits R., closing door behind him. Priest starts towards sick-room.*] An' how's Mollie?

MAGGIE. She just went to sleep, Father.

FATHER TIM. Thank God for that. I won't disturb her. [*Crosses down L.*] Have ye e'er a bit o' snuff on ye, Maggie?

MAGGIE [*taking tiny snuff can from huge pocket in her dress*].

Tons of it, Father . . . tons of it. [*He takes pinch of it. She offers priest her chair.*] Won't ye sit down by the fire, Father, an' toast yer shins for awhile?

FATHER TIM. It's yerself that needs to be sittin' down, Maggie, after bein' up all night. I won't stay long anyhow.

LIZZIE. Did ye hear any talk, Father Tim, how Shaun Mor is gettin' on collectin' the ten pounds the doctor's askin'?

FATHER TIM. I did. I had palaver with him along the cliff road a while back and his face was twice as long as Dennis's, for he had only three pound, nineteen, and fourpence ha'penny. An' when he left me he was on his way to the east ridin' to the house o' Peter Delaney.

MAGGIE. Three pound, nineteen, and fourpence ha'penny! Yerra, it's a terrible long way from ten pounds, Father.

LIZZIE. Isn't money the divil's own curse.

FATHER TIM [*chuckling*]. Well, Lizzie, *we're* not cursed much with it anyhow. [*They all laugh.*]

MAUREEN O'FLAHERTY [*enters R., carrying two eggs*]. God save all here!

MAGGIE and FATHER TIM. You too.

LIZZIE. The blessin' o' Mary on ye.

MAUREEN [*coming C.*]. Me mother sent me over to bring a couple of eggs for Mollie. One o' them is a duck egg. But there's good eatin' in it.

FATHER TIM [*chiding her*]. Ah sure, Maureen alana, 'twasn't to bring a duck egg ye came at all.

MAUREEN [*earnestly*]. Oh, but it was, Father.

FATHER TIM. Tell the truth and shame the divil, Maureen. Wasn't it to see Dennis ye came?

MAUREEN. 'Twas, Father. . . . But to bring the duck egg, too.

FATHER TIM. An' why wouldn't ye be comin' to see him?

Isn't it *Mrs Dennis O'Connor* ye'll be before the new moon sets in, with the help o' God?

[*MAUREEN moves up to cupboard C., puts egg on shelf.*

LIZZIE [*rising*]. Will ye sit down and have a cup o' hot tay to warin ye up, Father?

FATHER TIM [*looking at his watch*]. I haven't got time, Lizzie. I must go over to the chapel to hear confessions. [*He starts towards door R.*] Bannock live.

LIZZIE and MAGGIE. Bannock Dia lath!

[*FATHER TIM exit R. MAUREEN goes to bedroom door.*

MAGGIE. Sh! She's asleep.

MAUREEN. I won't waken her.

[*MAUREEN quietly exit, closing door behind her.*

MAGGIE. She's a fine daycent slip of a girl.

LIZZIE. Too bad this had to happen, with the priest only after readin' the first marriage banns for her and Dennie. Sure if Mollie dies, they'll have to wait another year.

MAGGIE. Will ye whist, woman . . . she'll be as fit as a fiddle in no time, with the grace o' God. [*She picks a sock from basket to darn.*] Isn't it a grand couple they'll make. [*Confidentially*] I wonder how much of a dowry she'll be bringin' him?

LIZZIE. The same five golden pounds that her mother had when she married Maureen's father.

MAGGIE. Isn't the dowry a queer custom entirely? Handin' the same money down from generation to generation, with nobody ever gettin' a bit o' use out of it.

LIZZIE [*superstitiously*]. Don't be talkin' like that, woman. Sure it's a terrible thing to get married without a dowry. As the ould sayin' goes, "Ne'er a fortune, ne'er a child!" It's well I remember the time when ould Mary Mulcahy lost her dowry money when the curragh turned over comin' back from the Fair o' Dunmore. Five golden pounds it

was, too ; and down it went to the bottom o' the sea, an' Mary's heart with it. If it wasn't for that she wouldn't ha' been an ould maid this six and twenty years.

MAGGIE. But didn't Shaun na' Cappaleen offer to marry her, gold or no gold ?

LIZZIE. An' do ye think, Maggie Rafferty, that any Innisheen Island woman 'ud be beholdin' to any man by comin' to him without a dowry ? It isn't daycent . . . an' it isn't lucky, either.

MAGGIE. But sure, the priest says the dowry doesn't matter.

LIZZIE. Musha, woman, an' what would the priest, God bless him, be knowin' about it ? Sure, he doesn't have to worry about gettin' married !

MAUREEN [*coming out of sick-room and closing door*]. Is the tay wet ?

MAGGIE [*looking into teapot*]. 'Tis, Maureen ; an' it's nice an' strong.

MAUREEN [*going to cupboard and getting cup and saucer*]. I'll take a little sup in to Katie Claffey. Sure, the poor woman's knees must be wore out, prayin'.

MAGGIE. Aye. It takes a long time to get around them seven-decade beads . . . [*Pours tea into cup held by MAUREEN.*] . . . an' Katie's such a terrible slow pray-er.

DENNIS [*entering R. in great excitement*]. I'm just after seein' the curragh ! It's landin' now in the cove.

MAGGIE. Thanks be to God !

[*The women bestir themselves. MAUREEN puts cup on table C. Runs to window to look out.*]

LIZZIE [*rising and lifting shawl over head*]. I'll run over to Shaun Scanlan's an' get a drop o' poteen to warm the men.

[*She starts across room R.*]

MAGGIE. Do, in the name o' God. Sure they'll be kilt with the cold. [LIZZIE exit R. MAGGIE, *tidying up room, takes clean*

towel from locker under cupboard and hangs it above bench L.
 Dennis dear, will ye put some water in the kettle? The doctor'll be needin' it. [DENNIS *puts water from bucket into kettle on fire.*] I'll take Katie's tay in.

MAUREEN. I'll do it, Maggie.

MAGGIE [*at door of sick-room*]. I want to go in anyway an' say a few prayers. An' while I'm at it, I'll say one for the doctor. Sure, he must be a terrible heathen entirely.

[*Exit, closing door.*]

DENNIS [*going to MAUREEN*]. Maureen darlin' . . . there's somethin' I must say to ye.

MAUREEN. What's troublin' ye, Dennie?

DENNIS. Suppose something happens to my mother?

MAUREEN. Aw it won't, Dennie.

DENNIS. It's a terrible thing to talk about, but if—if anything happened to her, God forbid, 'twould—'twould mean a whole year before we could get married an' . . . well . . . 'twouldn't be fair to ask ye to wait.

MAUREEN. Ye *do* want to marry me, don't ye, Dennie?

DENNIS. More than anythin' else in the world. I'll never love anyone else.

MAUREEN. Then what's a year, Dennie avic? Sure, I'd wait if it took a thousand years. Haven't I waited for ye all me life?

DENNIS [*patting MAUREEN's arm, simply*]. God bless ye, Maureen.

[*He starts pacing floor, worried.*]

MAUREEN. Now sit down, Dennie dear, an' don't be walkin' around like a slippery eel on a fryin'-pan. [*She takes his pipe down from mantelpiece and hands it to him.*] Here. Take a blast out o' yer pipe and I'll give ye a nice cup of tay.

DENNIS [*impatiently*]. No. I'll go out an' meet the doctor.

[*Exit R.*]

[*MAUREEN gets five cups, saucers, spoons, from cupboard*]

and places them on table C. Sugar bowl and small milk pitcher are added.

LIZZIE [*entering R., with package of tea and bottle of poteen*]. God bless ye, Maureen. You'll make a grand woman o' the house. [*She uncorks poteen bottle and pours some into four of the cups.*] I saw ould Dr Fitzwilliams comin' up the cliff road with the men . . . streelin' along behind like an ould cow's tail he was . . . I never liked a bone in that fella's skin. May the divil roast him for ten thousand years !

MAUREEN [*over her shoulder from fireplace L.*]. Musha, Lizzie, you're a terrible cursin' woman.

[*As she finishes filling fourth cup, LIZZIE, noting that MAUREEN is not looking, takes a quick drink from poteen bottle, wipes her lips and puts bottle on cupboard shelf. DENNIS enters R., followed by the DOCTOR, who does not dip his fingers in holy water.*

DENNIS [*starting immediately towards the sick-room*]. She's in here, Doctor.

DR FITZWILLIAMS. Take your time, my boy, take your time.
[*He lays his satchel on table C.*

[*Three CURRAGHMEN enter. They all dip their fingers in holy-water basin, unobtrusively cross their foreheads, and mumble the traditional greetings simultaneously.*

MICAL DUV and SHAMUS O'LOUGHLIN. God bless the house.

PADRIC KEARNY. An' all that's in it.

LIZZIE. You too.

[*She takes a pipe from her dress pocket and puts it in her mouth.*

MAUREEN. And welcome back.

[*DOCTOR removes his overcoat as the three CURRAGHMEN up R. stand about awkwardly. DOCTOR hands coat and hat to nearest CURRAGHMAN, who, puzzled as to what to do with them, tosses them over his shoulder on to*

bench up R. They probably land on floor and stay there.

MAUREEN hands each man a cup from table.

Good health to ye !

CURRAGHMEN [*raising cups in toast*]. God's blessin' on this house.

LIZZIE [*seated at fireplace, takes pipe from her mouth*]. More power to yer elbows !

[The men drink their poteen in one gulp. DOCTOR, now seated in chair, pays no attention to anyone but is busy grunting as he removes sea-boots. DENNIS is impatiently standing at sick-room door.]

MAUREEN [*coming to DOCTOR with cup*]. Just a drop to warm ye, Doctor.

DOCTOR [*looking up*]. What is it ?

MAUREEN. Poteen, sir.

DOCTOR [*waving it away gruffly*]. I'll take a cup of tea.

[MAUREEN replaces cup on table and pours cup of tea.]

DENNIS [*anxiously*]. But, Doctor . . . me mother is . . .

DOCTOR. Yes, yes . . . I know. . . .

MAUREEN [*coming over with tea, milk, and sugar*]. We just made the tay an' it's nice and strong.

[He takes it, adds milk and sugar, tastes it as if critical of its quality. He is indifferent to the stern looks of the

CURRAGHMEN.]

DOCTOR. Now then . . . who's been attending the patient ?

MAUREEN. Nora O'Malley, sir . . . Shaun Mor's sister. She's inside.

DOCTOR [*rising and removing his other coat and hanging it over back of armchair*]. Bring her out !

MAUREEN [*going into sick-room*]. Yes, sir.

DOCTOR [*to LIZZIE*]. Let me have some hot water and soap ! And a clean towel—if you have one.

[Rolls up his sleeves.]

[DENNIS takes towel and soap and gets wash-basin off hook on wall up L., and places them on chair down L.

LIZZIE [filling basin with hot water from kettle]. Dennie avic, run over and tell Father Tim that the doctor is here.

[DENNIS gets cap and exit R.] NORA and MAUREEN come out of sick-room, closing door.

NORA. Ye wanted to see me, Doctor?

DOCTOR [washing his hands]. Yes. Now—eh—tell me, just what have you done for the patient?

NORA. Well, sir . . . when I got here the men were after carryin' her up from the black rocks, where she went to cut seaweed for kelp . . .

DOCTOR [impatiently]. All right, all right, what did you do for her?

[He takes towel from back of chair and carefully dries hands.

NORA. Well, sir . . . I could see her leg was broke an' the collar-bone was hurted, so I straightened them out an' tied a piece o' wood to her leg. Then I sprinkled it with the blessed water from St Colum's well. It has great curin' powers in it an' it's better than any doctor. [DOCTOR gives her quick glance.] I remember the time when ould Mick Corrigan, God rest his soul, slipped an' . . .

DOCTOR [cutting her off and tossing towel on chair]. All right. Bring my bag. We'll have a look at her. [NORA takes bag from table. He leads way into sick-room, opens door, and sees two women kneeling in prayer at bedside.] Get these women out of here!

[Goes into room, followed by NORA.

[MAGGIE and KATIE rise quickly, and humbly leave room.

MAGGIE closes door after them. KATIE goes to bench up L., and sits there, resuming her prayers on rosary.

MAUREEN hangs up DOCTOR'S coat and hat.

MICAL DUV [moving down behind table]. Wouldn't that ould fella provoke a saint?

MAGGIE [*taking basin DOCTOR used and crossing R.*]. He's enough to provoke the whole *twelve* Apostles.

[*Exit door R.*]

LIZZIE [*to two CURRAGHMEN standing up R.*]. Will ye stop standin' there gawkin', an' drag that bench over, an' I'll give ye some tay to warm yer insides.

[PADRIC and SHAMUS *bring bench from up R. down to back of table C.*]

MAUREEN [*looking out window up R.*]. There's a great surf tearin' at the black rocks below. 'Twas a terrible bad crossin' ye had, Mical Duv.

MICAL DUV. It was. But we got here with God's help.

[*The CURRAGHMEN are seated at table now, PADRIC R., SHAMUS C., and MICAL DUV L.*]

SHAMUS. If the sea keeps runnin' like this, 'twill be terrible hard on the fishin'. There's a heavy feel to that north wind.

[MAGGIE *enters with empty basin, crosses up L., wipes basin, and hangs it on wall.*]

PADRIC. Sure, 't isn't like summer at all. Divil a sight o' the sun we've seen in weeks.

[*MAN passes window up R.*]

MAUREEN. Here's Shaun Mor comin' with the collection money for the doctor.

LIZZIE [*pouring tea*]. Hope he got enough to pay the pernicious ould pagan.

NORA [*opening door of sick-room*]. Maggie, will ye come in an' give me a hand?

[*MAGGIE exit into sick-room, closing door.*]

SHAUN MOR [*entering R. Holy water business*]. God save all here.

ALL. You too.

SHAMUS. An' how are ye, Shaun?

SHAUN MOR. I'm finely, thank God. [*Indicating sick-room*]
An' how's herself?

LIZZIE [*putting teapot on table*]. The doctor's in there with her now. Did ye get the money?

SHAUN MOR. [*coming to R. of table*]. It's distressed I am to tell ye, it was only a little over five pounds I was able to get. [*Taking money from pockets and placing it on table*] An' I scoured the Island clean. A fearful scarce thing is money nowadays.

MAUREEN. God help us.

SHAUN MOR. Will ye count it, Maureen? I never was much of a hand at the countin' o' money or sheep. [*He pulls out a ten-shilling note and a half-crown piece from another pocket as MAUREEN counts silently.*] An' here's twelve and six-pence from Father Tim, God bless him. He had it saved up to buy a pair o' shoes.

PADRIC. He's a daycent man.

LIZZIE [*back of table*]. Isn't ten pounds a power o' money to be chargin'?

MICAL DUV. It is. If Dr O'Sullivan wasn't up in Dublin, he'd have wanted to come over for nothin'. Wait till he hears about this.

LIZZIE. But why in the name o' God did ye agree to pay it?

SHAMUS. We had to. He was the only doctor in Dunmore an' he didn't want to come at all on account o' the storm.

PADRIC. Musha, he's a terrible ould coward.

SHAMUS. Sure, he only attends the rich people, an' he's got bags o' money.

MICAL DUV. You should see the grand house he lives in, Lizzie. Like a king's palace it is, with carpets that ye'd sink up to yer knees in, an' fine, soft chairs to sit on.

[SHAUN MOR *sits in chair R. of table.*

SHAMUS [*with boyish delight*]. An' on his table is the queerest

sort o' bell. Faith, ye can pick it up and shake it, an' divil a ring. But when it stood on the table, an' ye'd hit it on the top . . . just a small wallop . . . on the button . . . [*He demonstrates.*] . . . it makes a sweet, silvery music sound.

MICAL DUV. Aye, an' then a skinny woman 'ud come runnin' in and get terrible cross every time we hit it.

LIZZIE. Tsk, tsk, tsk ! It must be a great wonder entirely.

SHAMUS. I had a good chance to steal it when the ould fella's back was turned, but I didn't, God forgive me.

[*MAUREEN has finished counting and the money is carefully stacked on the table.*]

SHAUN MOR [*rising*]. How much is it, Maureen ?

MAUREEN. Five pounds, two an' nine-pence ha'penny.

MICAL DUV. Sure, that's only a little more than half it.

LIZZIE. It's enough for him, the cross-tempered ould weasel.

SHAUN MOR. It's more than enough, but we gave him our word, an' if we can't pay it, what'll the big world outside think of us ?

MAUREEN. What are we goin' to do ?

SHAUN MOR. I don't know, God help us. . . . [*Crossing L., pondering situation.*] I don't know.

SHAMUS. It's goin' to be a fearful disgrace.

[*MAUREEN wanders up R., and gazes out of the window.*]

PADRIC. I could write to me Uncle Matt in Australia.

SHAUN MOR. Maybe the doctor wouldn't wait.

[*Sick-room door opens. NORA enters with drinking-glass, goes to water-bucket on bench L. She leaves the door open.*]

NORA. Give us a spoon, Lizzie.

[*During this action, MAUREEN unobtrusively slips out door R.*]

LIZZIE [*handing NORA spoon*]. What does the doctor say ?

NORA [*hurrying back into sick-room*]. I'll tell ye later.

[*Exit, closing door.*]

SHAUN MOR [*going up to bucket*]. I'll have a drop o' that water, meself. [*He raises dipper to his lips. LIZZIE stops him*

LIZZIE [*going to cupboard*]. Oh, I forgot! I have a grand bottle of poteen that Shaun Scanlan sent over. [*Picking up bottle*] Sure, a toothful of it 'ud make ye feel like the Sultan o' Turkey.

SHAUN MOR [*regretfully*]. Ah, no, Lizzie. . . I—I took the pledge.

LIZZIE [*sympathetically*]. Tsk, tsk! Well, God help ye.

[*All laugh, including SHAUN.*

SHAUN MOR [*lifting cup in toast*]. Slauncha! [*Drinks water.*

PADRIC [*laughing and pointing to bench*]. Will ye look at the Widow Claffey there! She went to sleep with the angels, sayin' the rosary.

LIZZIE. Ah, the poor woman's wore out from bein' up with Mollie all night.

[*KATIE, as if hearing them, wakes and resumes her beads.*

DOCTOR enters from sick-room carrying his satchel, followed by NORA. All stare at him expectantly.

DOCTOR. She'll be all right in a couple of weeks. [*DOCTOR goes to chair R. of table, where he sits and pulls on his sea-boots. KATIE CLAFFEY rises and goes into sick-room.*] I made a careful examination. No internal injuries, but a broken leg and a bruised collar-bone. They're setting nicely, though. [*To NORA, who stands near door*] You're a very good bone-setter, Nora. See that you follow my instructions and everything will be all right.

NORA. Yes, sir.

[*MAUREEN enters door R. quietly, and stands listening.*

DOCTOR. And give her plenty of milk and a bit of meat . . . if you can get it.

NORA. I will, Doctor. [*Exit into sick-room, closing door.*

DOCTOR [*rising, and putting on first coat*]. I won't need to

come back. [*Noticing money piled on table*] And now—eh . . . [*Coughs.*] You know we doctors have to live, too. [*He gives a little forced laugh; then goes up R. to get overcoat and hat. MAUREEN slides out of his way, going to back of table C.*] Unfortunately, we have to charge what may sometimes seem like an exorbitant fee . . . but, of course . . . that's all a matter of opinion. After all, the trip here entails a long and dangerous crossing, and eh . . . my time is valuable. [*He puts on overcoat and returns to chair R. of table. He looks at everybody as he waits for some response, but there is only an embarrassing silence.*] It's too bad that society hasn't seen its way clear to adopt a more charitable attitude towards you islanders and provide you with adequate medical attention.

SHAUN MOR [*rising and coming to chair L. C.*]. Doctor . . . it's distressed I am to tell ye . . . but we weren't able to get the ten pounds to pay ye.

DOCTOR. *What!*

SHAUN MOR [*indicating money*]. We were only able to collect five pounds, two an' nine-pence ha'penny, sir.

DOCTOR. Have you the effrontery to suggest that I cut my fee?

SHAUN MOR. 'Tisn't that at all, Doctor . . . but, ye see, we . . .

DOCTOR [*sarcastically*]. Yes! I'm beginning to see: now that you know the patient is out of danger, it's obvious that you don't intend to live up to your obligations. Isn't that it?

[*A second's pause as SHAUN attempts to control himself.*]
MAUREEN [*going to SHAUN quietly and holding out five gold pounds in her hand*]. Shaun . . .

SHAUN MOR [*putting his hands behind his back and shaking his head*]. Blessin's o' God on ye, child . . . I couldn't!

MAUREEN [*simply, but determined*]. Take it, Shaun, or I'll pitch it into the sea!

SHAUN MOR. 'Twould be an unlucky thing to give up yer dowry, an' you only goin' to be wed.

MAUREEN. It's for Mollie I'm doin' it. I'd never forgive meself if I didn't. [*Deliberately places her gold on table with rest of money.*] There! It's done now. [*Steps back and looks appealingly at the men.*] And don't any of ye tell Dennie.

LIZZIE. Maureen alana . . . it's bad luck to fly in the face of God and tamper with the ould customs.

MAUREEN. I know. "Ne'er a fortune, ne'er a child." 'Tis the will o' God! [*She goes up L. and sits on bench.*]

SHAUN MOR [*picking up money, leaving several small coins and crossing front of table*]. We gave ye our word, Doctor. Here's yer money!

DOCTOR [*taking it, and counting*]. Thank you. . . . It isn't exactly the money . . . eight, nine, ten. . . . [*Putting it in his fat wallet*] It's the principle of the thing. [*Places wallet in pocket, picks up satchel, starts R. towards door.*] Well! Come on, you men! I'm ready to go back to the mainland.

[*Turns to see if they are coming.*]

PADRIC [*quietly, after an ominous pause*]. Can ye swim, Doctor?

DOCTOR. Why?

MICAL DUV [*deliberately*]. Because we're not takin' ye back!

DOCTOR [*looks from one to the other; steps forward*]. What do you mean? You agreed . . .

MICAL DUV. We only agreed to bring ye over. There was no word said about takin' ye back!

SHAMUS. Ye made a hard bargain, Doctor. We kept our end of it. We took ye hcre . . . ye got yer money. Now get back the best way ye can.

DOCTOR. But it's nine miles to the mainland. How am I going to get there? [*The MEN smile at each other. The*

DOCTOR *starts again to door.*] All right. I'll get three other curraghmen to do it.

[MEN *laugh.*

SHAMUS. There's not a curraghman on the Island of Innisheen would row ye back.

MICAL DUV [*poking SHAMUS*]. Now why did ye tell him, Shamus! 'Twould be no harm for him to go 'round and find out for himself.

SHAMUS. Ah, sure, wouldn't it be a sin now, to have the doctor wastin' his valuable time.

LIZZIE [*adjusting armchair cushion*]. Arrah, sit down, Doctor darlin', and make yerself at home. [*She pours tea and puts milk in it.*] Sure, ye'll need the rest. It's a long trip back . . . even if ye don't make it. There's nothin' like a daycent cup o' tay to calm yer nerves. How much sugar do ye take?

DOCTOR. I don't want any tea.

LIZZIE [*shaking her head*]. Isn't that strange now; an' when ye first came here ye were so fond of it. Tsk, tsk, tsk! Musha, the poor man's losin' his appetite.

[MEN *shake their heads in mock sympathy, stir and drink their tea noisily as DOCTOR paces up and down.* LIZZIE *offers cup to SHAUN, who is seated on chair L. C.*

SHAUN MOR. No, thank ye kindly.

[LIZZIE *sits on stool below fire and drinks the tea herself, enjoying the following scene.*

DOCTOR [*stops pacing*]. You can't do this to me. I'll have the law on you.

SHAUN MOR [*quietly, removing pipe*]. What law?

DOCTOR. I'll have you all thrown into jail for this.

SHAUN MOR [*rising and taking a step C.*]. Ah, it's nonsense yer talkin', Doctor. There's only one law here and we need nayther police nor jails to enforce it. 'Tis the law o' God. Maybe ye never heard of it? The law of this

Island is Christian charity . . . to visit the sick, help the poor, and love yer fella-man for the love o' God.

DOCTOR. I didn't come here to listen to any of your ignorant Island sermons.

SHAUN MOR. No ! Ye came here for ten pounds that we could ill afford. An' you knowin' that the money among us is as scarce as the potatoes we eat. An' it's distressed we are to get the price of a daycent pair o' britches to wear to Mass on Sunday.

DOCTOR. I'm not concerned with your economic circumstances. I had a right to exact what I consider a reasonable fee for my services.

SHAUN MOR [*turning back to chair L. C., sitting*]. An' so did Judas !

[*The DOCTOR looks at the MEN. All ignore him and eat their bread and drink their tea with relish. DOCTOR paces floor, sits in armchair, drumming the wood with nervous fingers. No sound is heard except the ticking of the large clock.*

DOCTOR [*looking at clock, then at watch ; rising*]. This is nothing short of kidnapping. Every minute you keep me here you make it harder for yourselves.

MICAL DUV [*to SHAMUS*]. Couldn't we let the doctor have that ould boat that was wrecked on Slieve Head ? You know . . . the one with the big hole in the bottom ?

SHAMUS. Ah, now, sure ye wouldn't want the doctor to be gettin' his feet wet. Besides, he might fall through the hole and be drowned with the weight of all that gold in his pockets.

[*The MEN grin.*

PADRIC. A grand idea just came into me mind. Do ye remember the story of Jonah in the whale's belly ?

MICAL DUV. Faith, I do indeed.

PADRIC. Well, I was just wonderin'. Maybe if we talked to one o' them whales lyin' off the Cliffs o' Mohill, he might be willin' to swally the doctor and spit him out in Dunmore?

MICAL DUV. It's a darlin' idea. We could toss the gentleman to the whales from the end o' the Cliff . . .

SHAMUS. Ah, no, boys. I'm afeared that wouldn't work at all. Them whales has terrible sensitive stomachs.

DOCTOR. Will you please stop this buffoonery? I'll . . . I'll pay you to take me back.

[MEN laugh hilariously.]

SHAUN MOR [rising, crossing to L. of table]. Stop yer jokin' now, boys. The doctor made a bargain with us to come here, so, why shouldn't we make a bargain with him to take him back?

DOCTOR [taking out his wallet]. All right. How much do you want?

SHAUN MOR [hitting the table with a thump]. The price is ten pounds!

[MEN rock with laughter.]

DOCTOR. Ten pounds? It's ridiculous . . . 'absurd! I can't afford it!

SHAUN MOR. "We're not concerned with yer economic circumstances."

DOCTOR. But the price is unreasonable.

SHAUN MOR. "These men have a right to exact what they consider a reasonable fee for their services."

DOCTOR. I'm willing to offer you a pound for the trip. That's, eh . . . six shillings and eight-pence apiece. Take it or leave it.

[He turns away R.]

[FATHER TIM and DENNIS enter R. The priest uses holy water.]

FATHER TIM. God save all here, and take it or leave what?

[DENNIS goes into sick-room.]

DOCTOR. Father . . . these men have refused to take me back to the mainland. I even offered to pay them. I made them a very generous offer.

SHAUN MOR [*L. C., on chair*]. Father, he said that a man had a right to charge what he thinks a job is worth. So I set a price of ten pounds for the trip back . . . an' cheap at that.

FATHER TIM. Ten pounds? [*He thinks, then laughs.*] Shaun, you're a king and a poet. [*To DOCTOR*] I'm afraid ye've put your foot in it, Doctor.

DOCTOR. But what am I going to do, Father?

FATHER TIM. Well, if it was for me to say . . . I might meet ye half-way on the price. [*He looks at the MEN.*] But it's not for me to decide. That's Shaun Mor's job. He's the elected King of this Island and a fair man.

[*PRIEST goes into sick-room closing door behind him.*]

DOCTOR [*taking out wallet again*]. What's your lowest price?

SHAUN MOR. All right . . . like Father Tim said . . . I'll meet ye half-way on it.

PADRIC. Hey, Shaun! Come here. There's somethin' else we want.

SHAUN MOR. Excuse me, Doctor.

[*He goes to MEN. They whisper and laugh while DOCTOR paces up and down. SHAUN MOR leaves them and goes L. to fireplace, where he fills and lights his pipe, using folded paper from can on mantel, which he lights from fire, replacing unburnt portion in can afterwards.*]

SHAMUS [*during above business*]. We're willin' to take ye, Doctor . . . if ye'll give us that little bell we saw on the table in yer house.

DOCTOR. What bell?

SHAMUS. The queer-lookin' bell with the knob on top that makes the silvery music sound.

DOCTOR. The servant's call-bell ?

PADRIC. That's the one.

DOCTOR [*relieved*]. Oh ! Yes . . . yes, of course. [*Puts wallet back in pocket, speaks magnanimously.*] Yes. I'll make you a present of it.

SHAMUS [*rising*]. Well, that's real daycent of ye. Come on, lads, we'll get the boat ready.

[*Getting his coat, MICAL DUV has risen and is putting on his coat.*]

MICAL DUV. We'd better take an extra pair of long oars. I'll run across to the house and get them. [*Goes to door R.*]

SHAMUS. Do that. We might need them. And make haste, will ye ? The tide'll be turnin' soon.

MICAL DUV. I will.

[*Exit R.*]

[*SHAMUS returns to bench, sits. DOCTOR paces floor.*]

DENNIS and FATHER TIM come out of sick-room. FATHER

TIM sits on bench up L., with MAUREEN. DENNIS stands near-by.

SHAUN MOR. Ye might as well sit down, Doctor, an' keep yerself warm while yer waitin'. There's a sharp wind blowin' outside. Mick won't be long.

DOCTOR [*sitting in armchair*]. I'm glad that's all settled.

SHAUN MOR. An' so am I. Well, eh—if ye don't mind, Doctor, we'd like ye to pay us that five pounds . . . now.

DOCTOR [*jumping to his feet*]. Five pounds ? For what ?

SHAUN MOR. Don't ye remember ? I agreed to meet ye half-way on the price.

DOCTOR. But . . . eh . . . I must have misunderstood you ?

SHAUN MOR. I'm sorry if ye did, Doctor. But that was the bargain. Sure, we only want the return of Maureen's dowry money.

DENNIS [*looking towards MAUREEN*]. Maureen . . .

DOCTOR. I won't pay it ! *[Sits down stubbornly.]*

[SHAUN MOR shrugs his shoulders, turns L. and sits.]

PADRIC. Looks like the doctor's thinkin' o' settlin' down here, Shamus.

SHAMUS *[taking off his coat]*. Well, now . . . 'twill be a great blessin' havin' a doctor handy.

DOCTOR *[rises, goes to SHAMUS and PADRIC]*. I'm willing to make a private deal with you fellows, if you'll only listen to reason.

PADRIC *[to DOCTOR]*. Nee hig-um may un Bearla.¹

SHAMUS *[to PADRIC]*. Kade thaw shea a-law, ah Fhawd-rick ?²

DOCTOR *[to PRIEST]*. What are they talking about ?

FATHER TIM. They say they don't understand English.

DOCTOR. B-but they were just speaking . . .

FATHER TIM. If ye'll take my advice, ye'll deal with Shaun Mor.

DOCTOR *[taking out wallet, going to SHAUN MOR]*. All right. I'm willing to pay you two pounds. *[SHAUN MOR turns his back.]* Very well then, three pounds.

[Places three pound notes on table.]

SHAUN MOR. I think the men might be willin' to row ye back . . . about half-way . . . four an' a half miles . . . for that. Sure ye could swim the rest of the way.

DOCTOR *[putting down another pound note]*. Four pounds then ?

SHAUN MOR. Ah, ye're gettin' closer to shore now. But it's still five pounds, an' in gold, Doctor, to land ye safe an' sound in Dunmore.

DOCTOR. It's an outrage ! That's what it is. *[Picks up pound notes, and grudgingly lays down five pounds in gold.]* There !

¹ I don't understand English.

² What is it he's saying, Padric ?

PADRIC. An' the bell?

DOCTOR [*turning, thoroughly exasperated*]. Yes, you can have it.

SHAUN MOR [*rising*]. Maureen . . . come here, alana. [MAUREEN rises from bench up L., crosses down to SHAUN MOR. He picks up money, takes her hand and puts the gold in it.] And may God bless ye, Maureen, with a grand houseful o' children.

MAUREEN. Thank ye kindly, Shaun.

[*She returns to bench L.*

[*Priest smiles, rises, and nods to DENNIS: DENNIS sits on bench with MAUREEN, and takes her hand. She smiles up at him happily. MICAL DUV enters R. He looks worried. He has trouble closing door against wind.*

DOCTOR rises, picking up satchel.

MICAL DUV. There's a big flock o' sea-birds after flyin' in from the north-west.

[*All but DOCTOR cross themselves. MEN look at each other fearfully.*

FATHER TIM. How does it look, Mick?

MICAL DUV. There's a bad sea risin'. I'm afeared it looks like a Nor'wester.

[SHAUN and PRIEST cross to window up R. and look out.

DOCTOR [*almost beside himself*]. What does all this mean?

FATHER TIM. It means, Doctor, that no boat can leave or land here in the teeth of a north-west gale.

SHAUN MOR. Saint Christopher himself couldn't get through that sea.

FATHER TIM [*getting his hat*]. I'd better go over to the chapel and ring the storm-signal. I'm afraid ye'll have to wait till it blows over, Doctor.

[*He exits hurriedly R., having same difficulty as MICAL DUV with door.*

DOCTOR [*crossing anxiously to SHAUN MOR*]. How long will this storm last ?

SHAUN MOR. Oh, sometimes only a few days . . . sometimes a month. . . .

DOCTOR. *A month !*

SHAUN MOR. We can't control the weather, Doctor.

[MICAL DUV and SHAMUS hang up coats and sit at table.

DOCTOR [*worried*]. But I just paid you five pounds to take me back.

SHAUN MOR [*calmly, as he lights his pipe at fireplace*]. An' so we will . . . when the storm blows over.

DOCTOR. When the storm blows over ?

SHAUN MOR. Amn't I after tellin' ye, Doctor, that the men'll land ye safe and sound ?

[*Low rumble of thunder is heard.*

DOCTOR. Yes, but . . .

SHAUN MOR. 'Twouldn't be honest now, would it, if ye got drowned before the men could keep their word ?

DOCTOR. But you said . . .

SHAUN MOR. We said we'd take ye back, but sure we didn't say *when*; did we ?

[LIZZIE has risen from stool near fireplace and is pouring tea for DENNIS and MAUREEN. She notices DOCTOR pacing impatiently and looking out window up R.

LIZZIE. Arrah, Doctor ; ye'll be gettin' yerself seasick lookin' out there. Come on over by the fire and make yerself comfortable.

DOCTOR [*irritably cynical*]. Don't worry about me. I'm quite comfortable.

[*Louder rumble of thunder.*

LIZZIE [*to SHAUN MOR in a loud whisper*]. Ah, the poor man is homesick. [*Sincerely solicitous*] Arrah, sit down, Doctor darlin', an' give yer ould carcass a rest, an' while yer waitin'

for the storm to blow over, maybe we can coax Shaun to tell us some of his grand stories.

[All but the DOCTOR are delighted. The CURRAGHMEN rise and pull their bench to place at parallel angle facing fireplace.]

ALL *[like children]*. Yes, come on, Shaun, tell us one.

PADRIC. Aye, tell the one ye told the night o' Matt O'Brien's wake.

MAUREEN. Shaun, tell us about the time the devil went through Athlone.

SHAMUS. Ah, that's a darlin' story.

[They have all seated themselves round fireplace, their backs to the DOCTOR, who, thoroughly disgusted, slumps in armchair R. of table.]

SHAUN MOR *[holding up his hand for silence]*. Sh! I'll tell ye one now, if ye'll all keep still. *[Notices DOCTOR. Hospitably]* Wouldn't ye like to come over an' join us, Doctor?

DOCTOR *[sourly]*. No, thanks.

[SHAUN MOR shrugs in disappointment. Then deliberately lights his pipe from fire while all wait expectantly. Louder rumble of thunder. DENNIS slips arm around MAUREEN's waist. SHAUN MOR clears his throat and narrates in measured tones of the native story-teller. He pays no further attention to the DOCTOR. During recital, DOCTOR coughs, looks impatiently at watch and nervously fingers his heavy gold watch-chain.]

SHAUN MOR. Well, here's a story was told me by a sailor-man who sailed the seven seas o' the world. . . . Once upon a time, there was an ould king, an' he lived in a grand golden palace in a lovely land across the sea. This ould king was a terrible heathen entirely. He had bags an' bags o' gold which he loved better than anything else in the world . . .

MICAL DUV. What was his name, Shaun?

SHAUN MOR. Oh, heh-heh, I forgot to tell ye. Sure his name was King Midas. Now, besides his gold, the king had a lot o' learnin' from grand books. But, in spite of his learnin', he had no wisdom at all. He spent all his time thinkin' of the gold, an' wishin' he had more of it. But, heh-heh . . . sure the divil a bit o' good the gold did him either, for he was so busy thinkin' of it, that he never had time to get a little fun out o' life ! [*They all laugh.* DOCTOR sits staring at his gold chain wound round his hand. Very loud thunder-crash, followed by distant tolling of church bell. All listen.] There's the storm bell ringin'.

[*They listen. Intermittent bell to curtain.*]

SHAMUS. Isn't a bell a grand sound ! [*Sighs.*] I wish we had that little bell the doctor promised us. 'Twas a darlin' sound.

MICAL DUV. Faith, it was that. And a lovely-lookin' object it was, too. Ah, 'twould be a real joy to have it.

PADRIC [*fishing in down-stage pocket he pulls forth the little bell, holds it proudly in the palm of his hand and grins at MICAL DUV*]. Well, here it is, me boys ! Sure I couldn't resist it . . . I said a little prayer when I was takin' it.

MICAL DUV [*shocked*]. But sure, that's *stealin'*, Padric, an' stealin's a terrible sin !

PADRIC. Aw, what're ye talkin' about, man. Didn't the doctor give it to us for takin' him back ?

[DOCTOR throws up his hands in complete resignation.

Intermittent sound of church bell heard through storm until curtain. "Bing !" PADRIC taps the bell. He holds out hand with the bell on it. Laughing and vastly amused, they all start taking turns at striking the bell, as . . .

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE SAGE OF CHELSEA

by

L. du Garde Peach

CHARACTERS

MARGARET CARLYLE

JAMES CARLYLE

THOMAS CARLYLE, *as a boy of nine*

LANDLADY

THOMAS CARLYLE, *at the age of thirty*

EDWARD IRVING

JANE CARLYLE

THOMAS CARLYLE, *at the age of forty*

JOHN STUART MILL

MRS TAYLOR

MARY AITKEN

THOMAS CARLYLE, *at the age of seventy-nine*

SUSAN

DISRAELI

L. DU GARDE PEACH is not only one of the most prolific and versatile radio playwrights in the country, having had some three hundred plays broadcast, including those attractive series *The Castles of England* and *Famous Men of Britain*, but he has written many film scenarios, including *Chu Chin Chow* and *The Great Mr Handel*. His full-length stage plays include *The Path of Glory* and *Night Sky*, and, more recently, *Napoleon couldn't do It*.

The Sage of Chelsea was broadcast in the *Famous Men of Britain* series, and is an intensely human and moving play.

THE SAGE OF CHELSEA¹

SCENE I

The SCENE is a living-room in a humble Scottish cottage. No scenery is necessary ; a table and two or three wooden chairs will adequately suggest the required atmosphere.

MARGARET CARLYLE, a young homely Scottish woman, is laying a simple meal and humming cheerfully to herself. As the clock strikes twelve her husband enters. He is dressed as a working man. His name is JAMES CARLYLE.

MARGARET [*her back to the door*]. Is that you, Tom ?

JAMES. It's not. It's me.

MARGARET. James. Ye're back early.

JAMES. Aye.

MARGARET. Is anything amiss ? [*Startled*] Why, whatever—— ! [*Accusingly*] Oh, James—ye've been fighting again !

JAMES. Aye.

MARGARET. What was it ?

JAMES. They gipsies. A band o' godless——

MARGARET [*quickly*]. Aye, aye. Dinna say what ye'll be sorry for.

JAMES. I'll no' be sorry for anything I can say about yon lot—or anything I can do to them, either ! An' if the law doesna' protect an honest man, he mon protect himself'.

MARGARET. They've been at ye again ?

¹ Application for permission to broadcast, record by mechanical means, or act this play in public must be made to the author's agents, Messrs Curtis Brown Ltd., 6 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London, W.C.2.

JAMES. Aye. I'll no' stand for it ! They'll no' get money out o' me.

MARGARET. They've threatened ye ?

JAMES. Aye. If I dinna pay 'em they'll no' let me do ma work in peace ! I'm a Godfearin' man, ye ken, Margaret.

MARGARET. Ye are, James.

JAMES. I'm not the only one. There'll be blood shed in Ecclefechan one o' these days.

MARGARET. Let me bathe your eye, James.

JAMES. It'll mend. Wheer's Tom ?

MARGARET. The laddie's no' hame yet.

JAMES. It's a long walk fro' Annan for wee legs.

MARGARET. They're no' that wee. I often think that Tom's a long sprawling ill-put-together thing.

JAMES. Aye—aye. But he's got a head on him.

MARGARET. He should be hame. It's past twelve—and he's aye one for his dinner.

JAMES. Aye, he is that.

[JAMES *throws off his coat and sits at the table.*

MARGARET. The meenister was here.

JAMES. Aye ?

MARGARET. He's tryin' to raise money.

JAMES. That doesna' surprise me. He's aye tryin' to raise money. What's it for this time ?

MARGARET. Window blinds for the kirk.

JAMES. Ye didna' gie him anything ?

MARGARET. I did not. I tellt him to ask ye himself.

JAMES. He'll get naethin' out o' me.

MARGARET. But, James—window blinds for the kirk !

JAMES. I'll no' be a party to any device to keep God's sunlight out o' God's own house.

[TOM CARLYLE *comes in.* *He is a boy of nine.*

THOMAS. Mither !

MARGARET. Here's Tom. Ye're lookin' fine, laddie. Are ye hungry?

THOMAS. Aye, Mither—I'm ay hungry.

MARGARET [*anxiously*]. Does your aunt no' give ye enough to eat?

THOMAS. Aye. But I'm ay hungry in between ma meals.

MARGARET. And how d'ye like your first week i' your new school?

THOMAS. I dinna.

JAMES. Why not?

THOMAS. I dinna like the boys. I tellt them I knew Latin, and they said I was ay braggin'. An'—an'—[*sniffing*]*—*they ca'd me greetin' Tom.

MARGARET. Why did they ca' ye that?

THOMAS. I greeted.

MARGARET. Ma poor wee laddie.

[*TOM sits at the table opposite his father.*]

THOMAS. Aye. But I punched one o' them on the nose an' another in the weskit.

MARGARET. Fightin'! I'll no' hae ye takin' after your father.

JAMES. An' wot's wrong wi' me?

THOMAS. But ye ken, Mither, I want to do ma Latin an' ma mathematics.

JAMES. An' I want to do ma work. If folks wilna let us, they must take the consequences, eh, Tom?

THOMAS. Aye.

MARGARET [*sighing*]. But it's a sair thing to be a fighter at your age. They ca' your father 'the fighting mason.' What they'll ca' you when ye're a meenister o' the kirk, I dinna ken.

JAMES. I'd forgotten ye were to be a meenister o' the kirk. Aye. It's no' the way tae prepare yoursel' for the meenistry.

THOMAS. But if the boys make fun o' me——

JAMES. It's deeficult. Aye, it's deeficult. Maybe if they provoke ye it's a different matter. But no fightin' for the pleasure of it, mind ye.

MARGARET. Here's your dinner, the both o' ye. Did ye walk all the way fro' Annun, Tom?

THOMAS. Aye.

MARGARET. Six miles!

THOMAS. The carrier gie'd me a bit lift.

MARGARET. How far?

THOMAS. Fro'—fro' Annun tae—tae the end of our street.

MARGARET. Ye've no' walked a hunder' yards!

THOMAS. I'm as hungry as if I'd walked six miles, Mither, I am really.

MARGARET. There. Eat that—then ye can gang out an' play.

THOMAS. I dinna want tae play. [*With his mouth full*] I've started French.

JAMES. I've ay wanted a son that could talk French an' Latin. What's the French for "It's a braw day"?

THOMAS. I've no' got as far as that. We've only had one lesson.

MARGARET. What did ye learn in your lesson?

THOMAS. Un—deux—trois—quatre——

JAMES. What's that?

THOMAS. It's countin'. Can I have a bit pie, Mither?

MARGARET. Ye've no' finished your broth.

THOMAS. I want a bit pie.

MARGARET. Ye'll finish your broth like a good wee laddie.

THOMAS [*resigned*]. Aye. [*Brightly*] Then may I hae a bit pie, Mither?

MARGARET. Mebbe.

THOMAS. When I'm a meenister o' the kirk, I'll be able tae eat a bit pie whenever I've a mind.

JAMES. When ye're a meenister o' the kirk, ye'll no' think o' carnal things.

THOMAS. What's carnal things?

JAMES. Pie—an' the like.

THOMAS. Is that so?

JAMES. Aye. A meenister o' the kirk sets his mind on higher things than a bit pie.

THOMAS [*with his mouth full*]. Then I'll no' be a meenister o' the kirk!

MARGARET. Oh, an' what will ye be?

THOMAS. I'll mebbe be a writer.

MARGARET. Ma conscience! The things ye say!

JAMES. Is there money tae it?

THOMAS. Every time ye buy a book, him that wrote it gets a bawbee—or mebbe mair.

JAMES. Aye, it sounds fine. But what way will ye write the book?

THOMAS. With ma pen.

JAMES. An' wheer will ye get your bit pie whiles?

THOMAS. When I'm bigger I'll gang tae the university in Edinburgh, an' I'll—

MARGARET. Dinna talk sae much, ma laddie. There's your bit pie. Get your teeth intae that.

THOMAS [*with enthusiasm*]. Aye, I will!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

A room in a humble lodging in Edinburgh. Chairs and tables are a little better than those in the first scene. Otherwise no change is necessary.

CARLYLE, *now a man of thirty, is sitting at the table, surrounded by untidy papers and books. A bowl of porridge is before him.*

The LANDLADY enters.

LANDLADY. Ye rang, Mr Carlyle ?

CARLYLE. Aye. What's this ?

LANDLADY. Parritch.

CARLYLE. It's no' my idea o' parritch.

LANDLADY. Ye're a deeficult lodger, Mr Carlyle, an' that's a fact. Three mornin's oot o' four ye've complained o' the parritch.

CARLYLE. Aye, an' I'll complain ten mornin's oot o' ten ! There's a lump in it.

LANDLADY. I've stirred it till ma arm aches, Mr Carlyle.

CARLYLE. It's ma stomach I'm concerned with, woman—no' your arm. There's rats in it !

LANDLADY. Rats ?

CARLYLE. Aye—rats ! A pain that's due to the disgustin' stuff that ye call parritch ! Take it away.

LANDLADY. What'll ye eat then ?

CARLYLE. Nothing. I'll starve ! And the world will lose a great author.

LANDLADY. Mebbe it will, Mr Carlyle, but if it does, it'll no' be *my* fault. There's naething wrang wi' the parritch.

CARLYLE [*with temper*]. I tell you there *is* ! Take it away ! Take *everything* away ! How can I write in this hovel—with you chattering—the noise—the discomfort—

LANDLADY [*philosophically*]. Aye—ye've got one o' your moods, Mr Carlyle. Mebbe ye'll be better by dinner-time—when ye're hungrier. There's a haggis.

CARLYLE. I don't want it. I never want to eat again !

LANDLADY [*calmly*]. Aye—aye. Ye'll ring when ye want your dinner.

CARLYLE. I tell ye—

LANDLADY. I haired ye. I've nae doubt your mither's a good woman, but if she can make parritch like——

CARLYLE [*shouting*]. She can ! Get out—and leave me alone ! I must work !

LANDLADY. Aye—ye'll be better alone. [*She goes out.*]

CARLYLE [*to himself*]. So it goes on ! Noise. Distraction. No time—no leisure—no peace ! A genius and—[*irritably*] why didn't that woman bring the letters ?

[*He rings a bell violently. After a little pause the LANDLADY returns.*]

LANDLADY. Ye rang, Mr Carlyle ? Will I bring the parritch back ?

CARLYLE. No ! Where are the letters ?

LANDLADY. They never come before twenty past. But there's a gentleman tae see ye. A Mr Irving——

CARLYLE [*eagerly*]. Irving ! Where is he ? Show him in ! Don't keep him waiting——

LANDLADY. He's here. [*IRVING comes in.*]

IRVING. Tom !

CARLYLE. Edward ! What are *you* doing in Edinburgh ?

IRVING. I had to come.

CARLYLE. Preaching ?

IRVING. To-morrow.

CARLYLE. I'll come to hear ye !

LANDLADY [*patiently*]. Will I bring the parritch, Mr Carlyle ?

CARLYLE. No ! Yes ! Wait. [*To IRVING*] Have you had breakfast ?

IRVING. Yes.

CARLYLE [*with heavy politeness*]. You will please take the disgusting mess you call parritch, Mrs Macintosh, and pour it down the drain.

IRVING [*remonstrating*]. Tom !

LANDLADY. He doesna mean it, sir.

CARLYLE. I *do* mean it ! Burn it—destroy it—bury it !
And never dare to make parritch again !

LANDLADY. Ye'll no' hae tae mind what he says, sir—he's
no' himsel' this mornin'. [*She goes out.*]

CARLYLE. That woman will drive me insane !

IRVING. Then why not change your lodgings ? Find
another landlady.

CARLYLE. They're all the same. Stupid—or dirty—or
dishonest.

IRVING. What you want is a wife.

CARLYLE. Now what made you say that ? Has Jane written
to ye ?

IRVING. Jane ?

CARLYLE. Jane Welsh.

IRVING. So *that's* what's on your mind, is it ?

CARLYLE. No. It's indigestion—and work—and the world.

IRVING. What's the world done ?

CARLYLE. Nothing. That's the trouble. I've got brains,
Edward. I *know* I've got brains. Industry—intelligence—
genius ! And the world lets me stay here—in this miserable
lodging—wasting myself !

IRVING. You're a great talker, Tom—especially about your-
self. But you can't expect the world to recognize you're
a genius until you do something to prove it.

CARLYLE. *The Life of Schiller* ?

IRVING. Yes, that was good. I read it in *The London
Magazine*. But you've got to do better.

CARLYLE. I've translated *Wilhelm Meister*.

IRVING. There's nothing original about a translation.
You've got to *do* something—something original.

CARLYLE. It's easy for you. You get up in your London
pulpit and talk—and all London comes to hear ye.

IRVING. You think that's easy.

CARLYLE. You don't sit here—surrounded by all sorts of difficulties,—writing your heart out ! And what do I get for it ? Nothing !

IRVING. You want success too early, Tom. You'll not get it that way.

CARLYLE. How can I get it ?

IRVING. If you want the truth, Tom—by doing something good instead of just talking about it.

CARLYLE. I *have* done something. I've written to Goethe.

IRVING. You have, eh ? That's good. The unknown Scottish boy writes to the greatest living poet !

CARLYLE. Is it *my* fault I'm unknown ?

IRVING. Yes. And the pity of it is, you've no need to be. You're sorry for yourself, Tom—about nothing. Do you think people would come to hear me if I was sorry for myself ? Not one of them. Work, man ! Write the stuff that's in you—then you won't have time to complain that the world neglects you. What have you said to Goethe ?

CARLYLE. I've sent him *Wilhelm Meister* and the *Life of Schiller*.

IRVING. Does he read English ?

CARLYLE. I've no idea.

IRVING. Then what do you expect to get out of it ?

CARLYLE. What you get out of the crowds that come to Hatton Garden to hear you preach—recognition—encouragement—something tae show that someone believes in me.

IRVING. And you choose Goethe ?

CARLYLE. Why not ?

IRVING. Well, no one will be able to say that you're without ambition—of a sort.

CARLYLE. It's no' a question of ambition. Goethe's got a brain. As good as mine.

IRVING. He'd be pleased to know that.

CARLYLE. You can sneer—

IRVING. I'm not sneering. But you're asking for a disappointment, Tom. If you imagine that Goethe—*Goethe!*—will bother with you—yet, you're mistaken. You've published a couple of books. That's good enough for a young man—but wait until you've done something good before you go to a man like Goethe.

CARLYLE. You don't understand—

IRVING. I understand *you*—perfectly. You know, I don't think Jane Welsh is good for you.

CARLYLE. Why not?

IRVING. She flatters you. And if she marries you, she'll flatter you worse than ever.

CARLYLE. Who said she was going to marry me?

IRVING. You as good as admitted it.

CARLYLE. I've written *asking* her to marry me.

IRVING. Heaven help you if she does!

CARLYLE. You said I wanted a wife.

IRVING. I doubt if Jane Welsh is the wife you want.

CARLYLE. You introduced me to her.

IRVING. I did—may heaven forgive me.

[*The LANDLADY returns.*]

CARLYLE [*annoyed*]. What do you want, Mrs Macintosh? If you say parritch—

LANDLADY. The post. There's twa letters for ye.

CARLYLE. The post, of course. Give them to me.

LANDLADY. Will the gentleman no' hae some parritch? They're fine an'—

CARLYLE. No.

IRVING. No, thank you, Mrs Macintosh. It's very good of you, but—

[CARLYLE *eagerly opens one of the letters and reads it.*]

LANDLADY. I'd dae anything for a friend o' Mr Carlyle. He's a queer gentleman, but he has a deal to thole. [*Confidentially*] He has a rat inside him.

CARLYLE [*excitedly*]. Go away ! Edward—listen to this ! It's from Goethe !

IRVING. Goethe !

LANDLADY. Then ye'll no' be wantin' the parritch, sir ?

CARLYLE [*shouting*]. No ! Go away !

LANDLADY [*calmly*]. If ye do, ye've only tae ring, sir.

[*The LANDLADY goes out.*]

CARLYLE. That woman will be the death of me.

IRVING. You're more likely to be the death of her. What does Goethe say ?

CARLYLE. It's in German.

IRVING. I'm not surprised.

CARLYLE [*excitedly*]. He says—er—the—yes ! The *Life of Schiller* is to be translated into German ! He offers to write a preface to it ! Er—"great abilities"—"moral force"— ! What do you think of that ?

IRVING. You're beginning.

CARLYLE. Beginning ? Recognition in Germany—by Goethe ! And you call it beginning !

IRVING. So will you in a few years—if you really write the stuff you're capable of ! Whom is the other letter from ?

CARLYLE. Jane Welsh. Goethe says that the whole philosophy of my—

IRVING. Aren't you going to open it ?

CARLYLE. Open what ?

IRVING. Jane's letter.

CARLYLE. It can wait. Goethe offers to help me to meet the leading German philosophers and—

IRVING. You said you'd written asking her to marry you

CARLYLE. So I did. Yes—of course.

[*He opens the second letter.*]

IRVING. Well ?

CARLYLE [*rather overcome*]. She's going to marry me, Edward. Jane—my wife—and Goethe—my friend !

IRVING. I hope you'll be happy.

CARLYLE. And famous !

IRVING [*a little doubtfully*]. I hope you can be both—but——

CARLYLE. Wait. You were right. This *is* the beginning. I'll *make* the world listen to me !

CURTAIN

SCENE III

The SCENE is a more comfortable room, CARLYLE'S study in Cheyne Row, Chelsea.

CARLYLE, now about forty, is idling about the room. JANE, his wife, enters.

JANE. Why, whatever is the matter ? You're not working !

CARLYLE. I'm taking a holiday.

JANE [*incredulously*]. You ! Taking a holiday ! Impossible !

CARLYLE. Why shouldn't I take a holiday ? For seven months I've been writing—five or six hours a day. Have I no' deserved a holiday ?

JANE. Of course. And for months and months before that you were reading all those dull books about the French Revolution.

CARLYLE. I didn't find them dull.

JANE. Anybody else would have done. But you knew how to make them come alive. Your *French Revolution* is the best thing you've written. I'm proud of you.

CARLYLE. I've only finished the first volume, remember. Jane, I can't tell you with what relief I wrote the last words of that volume. D'ye know what I did when I'd finished it?

JANE. What?

CARLYLE. I burnt all the notes I'd made for it—piles of them. "There," I said—"I've finished wi' ye! An' hours o' labour ye've cost me."

JANE. You really burnt them?

CARLYLE. Aye—all the notes. I wonder what Mill will think of the volume.

JANE. John Stuart Mill has been a good friend to us.

CARLYLE. He has that. He lent me a hundred and fifty books on the French Revolution.

JANE. And you read them all.

CARLYLE. Every word—and poor stuff some o' them were, too. Janie, my book is going tae make the whole o' them back numbers!

JANE. I'm sure it will. When did Mr Mill take it?

CARLYLE. On Friday. It's Monday to-day. Maybe he'll come an' tell me what he thinks of it. He's a great man, Janie. If *he* likes it, we're made.

JANE. It's been a struggle. But I was right, wasn't I, when I made you burn your boats and come to London?

CARLYLE. Aye. And I was right when I refused to write their wee bits and scraps o' newspaper articles.

JANE. All the same, we *could* do with the money.

CARLYLE. We've money enough.

JANE. You don't have to do the housekeeping.

CARLYLE [*severely*]. That wife o' Leigh Hunt's been borrowing again?

JANE [*laughing*]. Not money. What do you think she borrowed this morning?

CARLYLE. She'd borrow anything.

JANE. A fender !

CARLYLE. Now what would the woman want with borrowing a fender ?

JANE. I've no idea.

CARLYLE. Ye'll no' lend her money, Janie.

JANE. Don't worry. I haven't any to lend.

CARLYLE. Ye will have—when *The French Revolution* is published. It's going tae make my name—and both our fortunes.

JANE. And you're not sorry we left Craigenputtock ?

CARLYLE. No.

JANE. Not the least bit ?

CARLYLE. No' the least bit.

[*A door-bell rings in the distance.*]

JANE. Who's that ?

CARLYLE. Mill ! He's brought back the first volume. Now we shall know. Open the door to him, Janie—

[*JANE goes out CARLYLE waits a moment impatiently.*]

[*JANE returns, very agitated.*]

JANE. Thomas—something has happened—I don't know what. Mr Mill is as white as a sheet and—

[*MILL comes in.*]

MILL. Carlyle—I don't—

CARLYLE. What's the matter ? Are ye ill ?

MILL. No. I don't know how to tell you.

CARLYLE. What is it, man ? Is it *The French Revolution* ?

MILL. Yes.

CARLYLE. Ye don't like it ?

MILL. Worse than that.

CARLYLE. Out with it, man ! Dinna keep us in suspense.

MILL. It's burnt.

CARLYLE. It's *what* ! ?

MILL. The manuscript—I lent it to Mrs Taylor. A servant found it—and—used it to light a fire !

JANE. Oh, Thomas—— !

MILL [*very distressed*]. What can I say ?

CARLYLE. Nothing.

MILL. If I'd had the least idea——

CARLYLE. I know. [CARLYLE *laughs—a short bitter laugh*]

CARLYLE. Seven months !

JANE. Isn't there anything——

CARLYLE. No.

MILL. I assure you, Carlyle, Mrs Taylor is as upset as I am. She's in my carriage. May I bring her up ?

CARLYLE. It would do no good.

MILL. All the same, she'd like to——

[*He goes out quickly as he speaks.*]

JANE. It's terrible.

CARLYLE. Like a sentence of death.

JANE. I know it isn't his fault, but——

CARLYLE. Poor fellow. He's terribly cut up.

JANE. He ought to be !

CARLYLE. We mustn't let him see how serious it is for us.

JANE. I don't know how you can take it so calmly ?

CARLYLE. Calmly ! I'm no' calm, Janie—I'm stunned. It's—it's like a knock-out blow——

[MILL *returns with* MRS TAYLOR, *a stupid, fashionable woman. She is superficially apologetic.*]

MILL. Here is Mrs Taylor. She is simply overwhelmed——

MRS TAYLOR. Oh, Mr Carlyle—it was really too unfortunate.

CARLYLE [*stiffly*]. I beg ye'll no' distress yourself, ma'am.

MRS TAYLOR. Oh, but I do. It has quite decided me to get rid of that stupid maid. She's broken innumerable cups—and now she's burnt your manuscript. I let her see that I was really vexed with her.

CARLYLE [*dryly*]. That's something, ma'am.

MRS TAYLOR. Yes. It's such a pity—after you'd taken all the trouble of writing it. I can't think what the silly girl was doing.

MILL [*a little uncomfortably*]. No—of course not. The—er—the serious thing is the loss to Mr Carlyle.

MRS TAYLOR. Oh, I do see that. It must be very annoying.

CARLYLE [*sarcastically*]. Annoying is the word, ma'am.

MILL. Scarcely. Mr Carlyle has put seven months of genius into that work, and—

MRS TAYLOR. Seven months ! Fancy !

MILL. Now he will have the whole thing to do over again. [*Anxiously*] You will re-write it, of course.

CARLYLE. I don't know.

MILL. But—I know the mere physical labour of re-writing it is appalling to think of—but the groundwork is done. You have your notes.

CARLYLE. No.

MILL. But surely you made notes—the notes from which you worked ?

CARLYLE. I made them—but I destroyed them when the volume was finished.

MILL [*aghast*]. You mean you haven't a single word ?

CARLYLE. Just that.

MILL. This is terrible ! You hear that ? Mr Carlyle has destroyed his notes.

MRS TAYLOR. But surely Mr Carlyle has got it all in his head. I know when I have written a letter, I can remember practically everything I've said for *days* afterwards.

MILL. This is scarcely the same thing as writing a letter.

MRS TAYLOR. Oh no, I see that—but you understand what I mean. [*Casually*] What a pretty dress you have on, Mrs Carlyle. I had one cut just like it last year—or was it the year before ?

MILL [*low voice*]. Carlyle—I'd like a word with you.

CARLYLE. What is it?

[MILL and CARLYLE move aside, leaving MRS TAYLOR talking to JANE, who is watching her husband in deep distress.]

MILL [*embarrassed*]. I'm afraid Mrs Taylor doesn't quite—er—understand what this means to you. But I assure you I do. I know that nothing I can do can possibly make up to you in any way for the labour which is now wasted—but—er—if you will allow me—

CARLYLE. What's this? A cheque?

MILL. Through my fault seven months of your time have been wasted—you must at least—er—let me—[*with a rush*]—dash it, my dear fellow, you must let me keep you for another seven whilst you re-write it.

CARLYLE. That's kindly meant of ye.

MILL. It's the least I can do. You'll make me feel a little less conscience-stricken if you'll accept it.

CARLYLE. Aye. I'll accept some of it.

MILL. All of it. And if it's not enough—

CARLYLE. It's too much. A hundred pounds is all we'd have spent in seven months.

MILL. Then the other hundred will perhaps—er—help to—er—help you to—er—get over your—er—

CARLYLE. Money couldn't do that.

MILL. No, of course—I realize that. But—as a trifling—shall we say—compensation. Come, Carlyle—you know how much I admire your work. I hope you know that I value your friendship. So as a friend—

CARLYLE. No. It wasna your fault. But because of the necessity, I'll rob ye to the extent of the hundred—but no more.

MILL. Is that your final word?

CARLYLE. Aye.

MILL. Well, at least you will remember it's there if you want it.

CARLYLE. I shan't. [*Looking at JANE*] I can see that Janie is getting to the end of her politeness, yonder. If ye don't mind, we'll join the ladies.

MILL. We must go in any case. You've taken this magnificently, Carlyle. I can't tell you how I felt.

CARLYLE. I can imagine it.

[*MILL turns to MRS TAYLOR.*]

MILL. Come, my dear. We have taken up too much of Mr Carlyle's time.

MRS TAYLOR. Yes. And I'm *sure* Mr Carlyle wants to sit down and start writing his book all over again.

CARLYLE. That's the last thing I want to do, ma'am.

MRS TAYLOR. Oh, but it will be *such* fun trying to remember what you said.

CARLYLE. Ye've a fine notion o' fun, ma'am, but I'm afraid it's no' mine !

MILL. *Really*, we must go. Good-bye, Mrs Carlyle. Don't let your husband get despondent. Good-bye, Carlyle.

CARLYLE. Good-bye to ye.

MRS TAYLOR. Good-bye, Mr Carlyle. And you're not the *only* sufferer, you know. I've got to find a new maid, and the creatures are so *terribly* difficult. Good-bye. Good-bye, dear Mrs Carlyle.

JANE. Good-bye, ma'am.

[*They go out*]

JANE. I'd like to wring that woman's neck !

CARLYLE. If it would do any good, I'd do it wi' ma ain hands ! When I think o' the weary hours——

JANE. Don't think of them. You *can* re-write it. Better than before, probably. But we've got to live

CARLYLE. We don't have to worry about that. Mill's a good fellow. I've a hundred pounds fro' him.

JANE. He's given you a hundred pounds?

CARLYLE. Aye.

JANE [*relieved*]. Oh, Thomas! We *shall* pull through, after all.

CARLYLE [*sighing*]. Aye—we'll pull through, Janie.

CURTAIN

SCENE IV

A room in the house in Cheyne Row. MARY AITKEN, Carlyle's niece, is sitting sewing. CARLYLE enters. He is now an old man of 79, and is wearing the broad-brimmed black hat and the cape associated with him.

MARY. I'm so glad you're safely back, Uncle.

CARLYLE. So am I, my dear.

MARY. Give me your cloak—and your stick. There. Come by the fire.

[*CARLYLE sits in an easy chair, and MARY disposes of his cloak, etc.*

MARY. Well? Aren't you going to tell me all about it?

CARLYLE. There's nothing much to tell.

MARY [*indignantly*]. Nothing much to tell, indeed! When you've been to the Prussian Embassy to receive the Prussian Order of Merit! Was the Ambassador nice to you?

CARLYLE. He was very complimentary—especially about my book on Frederick the Great. It was obvious he hadn't read it.

MARY [*anxiously*]. You didn't say so?

CARLYLE. Very nearly. Forty years ago I should have done——

MARY. I expect you would. Everybody was afraid of you then, weren't they?

CARLYLE. Except your aunt. Janie wasn't afraid of me. She used to bully me—unmercifully.

MARY [*reprovingly*]. Oh, Uncle! I expect you used to lead her an awful life. But she *was* happy, wasn't she?

CARLYLE. I never really knew.

MARY [*brightly*]. Aren't you going to show it to me—the medal—or star—or whatever it is?

[CARLYLE produces from his pocket a small leather case containing an order on a ribbon.]

CARLYLE. There you are, my dear.

MARY. Oh! Put it on, Uncle.

CARLYLE. No—no. Foolishness.

MARY. I want to see it. There. You look *ever* so distinguished, Uncle.

[She puts the ribbon round his neck. A door-bell rings in the distance.]

CARLYLE. What's that?

MARY. Only someone at the door. Susan will see to it.

CARLYLE. If it should be someone for me—— Take this thing off, Mary.

MARY. It will only be the baker. Please keep it on—just till tea-time.

CARLYLE [*kindly*]. Ye're a poor daft body, Mary. But I'll just hae to humour ye. Well? What is it?

[SUSAN, a little maidservant, enters.]

SUSAN. If you please, sir, a gentleman——

CARLYLE. Who?

SUSAN. Mr Disraeli, sir——

CARLYLE. Disraeli! Here—take this thing off and——

[DISRAELI comes in. He is 70, and should be dressed and made up to resemble pictures of Disraeli at this period.]

[SUSAN goes out.]

DISRAELI. Excuse me for calling like this, Mr Carlyle. Good evening, ma'am.

CARLYLE. My niece.

DISRAELI. I am delighted, ma'am. I took the liberty—one author, though a very modest one—to another, sir—

CARLYLE. Aye. I've read some of your stuff, Mr Disraeli. You should have stuck to politics. Ye're better at it.

DISRAELI [*laughing slightly*]. You say what you think, Mr Carlyle.

CARLYLE. I've done so for over seventy years.

DISRAELI. Quite so. Ah, I see you are wearing your—er—new distinction.

CARLYLE. Pah! Here—take the thing off, Mary.

DISRAELI. No—no. No man has deserved it more, sir. In fact, it is a similar errand which brings me here.

CARLYLE [*suspiciously*]. Aye? What errand might that be?

DISRAELI. As Prime Minister of this country I am naturally a busy man, Mr Carlyle. But I allowed myself the pleasure of calling on you personally. I feel—and I am sure the country is behind me in this—that official recognition of your great services to literature has been too long delayed. Prussia has already honoured you. It is only right your own country should not be behind-hand. Her Majesty has authorized me to offer you the Grand Cross of the Bath, and the Government would be happy to add a pension.

[*A little pause.* CARLYLE *smiles grimly.*]

DISRAELI. Well? What do you say, Mr Carlyle?

CARLYLE. I was thinkin' the money would ha' been useful when Janie and I first came to London.

DISRAELI. No doubt.

CARLYLE. It's ower late now. No, Mr Disraeli. I'm grateful for the attention, but ye may keep your wee cross

DISRAELI. Oh, but surely——

CARLYLE. Titles of honour are out of keeping with my way o' living. As to money, after long years of frugal, but, thank God, not degrading poverty, it has become in this latter time abundant.

DISRAELI. You will think this over To-morrow—or next week——

CARLYLE. I'm no' in the habit o' changing ma mind. I'll say thank ye—but I'll decline your offer.

DISRAELI. I'm not really surprised. Somehow I thought you would.

CARLYLE [*interested*]. Aye? Do ye smoke, Mr Disraeli?

DISRAELI. Sometimes, I admit.

CARLYLE [*very Scots*]. Mary—tw a lang pipes an' the tobacco. Me an' the Prime Meenister'll sit by the hearth-side a wee while an' hae a crack. What d'ye say?

DISRAELI. I can only say, Mr Carlyle, that the Prime Minister is honoured by your invitation.

CARLYLE. Aye—aye. But, mon—I wish Janie could ha' heard that.

[DISRAELI sits over against CARLYLE as MARY produces two long churchwarden pipes and a jar of tobacco. They light up with clouds of smoke.]

CURTAIN

THE AGE OF LEISURE

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

by
Neil Grant

CHARACTERS

in the order of their appearance

JANE
MUGGS
TOMMY
PERCY
LIZZIE
ISADORA

NEIL GRANT is popular with amateurs all over the world. His one-act satires, including *The Last War* and *The Hat Trick*, are amongst the most original plays of our day.

But he is well known in the professional theatre too. His play *Petticoat Influence*, with the late Sir Nigel Playfair and Miss Diana Wynyard in the chief parts, had a long run at St Martin's Theatre, London. This was followed by *The Nelson Touch* and afterwards the play was made into a film of the same name with George Arliss playing the lead. Another play, *Dusty Ermine*, had a long run at the Comedy Theatre with Leonora Corbett in the cast.

The Age of Leisure was written specially for this collection.

THE AGE OF LEISURE¹

*The SCENE is an office—modern type. Desk, chairs, radio at back.
One door left.*

JANE *is seated at desk right centre back stage. She is examining papers and card indexes. She is a pretty, efficient girl, and is keen on her job, but has a condescending manner of talking. A knock at the door L.*

JANE [*in pleasant voice*]. Come in.

[MUGGS enters. He is a middle-aged man of working-class type wearing the overalls of a plumber. He shuts door gingerly. JANE looks him up and down.]

JANE [*with mock reproof*]. Now ! Now !

MUGGS [*in the manner of a spaniel*]. Wot's wrong, miss ?

JANE [*gently*]. Is the costume quite the thing ?

MUGGS [*as he stands close to the desk*]. I seys to me old woman : "Jist for the sake of the bad old times I'll git into me coronashun robes this lovely mornin'."

JANE [*still sweetly reproving*]. You must remember, Muggs, that that sort of "robes" is permitted only in historical plays or fancy dress balls.

MUGGS. Beggin' your parding, miss, 'istry pliy and fancy dress balls ain't much in me line. I cawn't even watch 'em, much less mix meself up in 'em.

JANE. Do sit down.

MUGGS [*sitting down in chair to left desk and twiddling his cap*]. Them ol' clo'es they brings back the 'appy 'appy diys.

[Sighs]

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

JANE [*interrupting*]. What can I do for you ?

MUGGS [*nervously*]. You knaow, miss.

JANE. Now, now, Muggs, really.

MUGGS [*wheeling*]. Jist a job o' work, miss, for the luv—

JANE. Muggs, you must face the facts. In the working-age you were a plumber, weren't you ?

MUGGS. Yes, miss, a poor, well-meanin', 'armless plumber.

JANE. Well, as you know perfectly well, plumbing has been abolished. And if plumbing is unnecessary, so, *bien entendu*, are plumbers.

MUGGS. I doan't a'conterdict ye, miss, but there was a bit o' a frost last night. Couldn't you let a pipe or two burst ?

JANE. There are no pipes to burst, Muggs. We live in the pipeless age, my good man.

MUGGS [*hopelessly*]. I forgot, miss. Maybe, miss, we could sort o' pretend there was pipes and pretend there was a burst jist for a lark in a manner of speakin'.

[*He looks at her wistfully*]

JANE [*laughing*]. Don't be antediluvian, Muggs. You must be reasonable.

MUGGS [*eloquently*]. Miss, could you ever come across a more reasonable body of men than plumbers ? Did we ever axe for too much work ? Why, me and me mates were a joke, so we were. In the 'alls and the wireless plumbers was alus bein' made gime of. We never grumbled if there wasn't too much doin' and who ever heard of a self-respectin' plumber a'hurryin' over 'is job ? That's why me and the likes o' me deserves speshul considerytion in them 'ard diys when the progus o' science 'av made work as rare as orkids in Whitechapel.

JANE. We live in marvellous times, Muggs

MUGGS [*interrupting*]. I agrees, miss, but the more I marvels the more I yawns.

JANE [*horrified*]. You're not bored, are you ?

MUGGS. Yep, miss, to be frenk I am. I used ter think it was 'ighly eddicated gals like you as was bored, but I tells you a workin' man like me can be as bored-to-diy as a dook or a perfessor.

JANE [*as she busies herself with card index*]. But this is monstrous. Let me see now. What is your number ?

MUGGS. Never mind me number. Call me Muggs, Monkey Muggs, as me pals called me.

JANE [*reading from card*]. Here we are. Why, your programme for the next six months is most varied and delightful. You are to have a two months' geology course in the Isle of Skye. Then you are going on a yachting cruise to explore the migrations of herrings and haddocks. [MUGGS *groans*.] A course of physical exercises at Harrogate, with evening lectures to be followed by an examination on Aristotle's *Poetics*, and finally a lovely vacation on Scottish golf courses Muggs, how dare you be bored ?

MUGGS. Ow, miss, wot 'ave I done to deserve that ?

JANE. We must employ your leisure for you—profitably.

MUGGS [*with more vehemence*]. Don't tike advantage of the good nater o' plumbers. Becos' we was easygoin' you mustn't think you and the guverment can shoot us off our jobs altogether and expexs us ter tike it layin' down. I'm a quiet sort o' bloke, miss, but I tells you straight, there's a ding'rous temper abroad wiv this cuttin' down hours o' work and times orf for culdeer, and grouse shootin', and the loikes for the workers which the workers would prefer ter 'and back to them as better deserves it. We don't want the twelve-hour week, we don't want three months' vacations as if we was judges, we don't want culdeer, we don't want to arsk the herrin' an' the haddock where they be a'goin', we jist wants to catch 'em and eat 'em. [*Rising in his excitement*]

It ain't thought, it's sweat I wants to see on me brow. It ain't leseer, it's work wiv the right to ca' canny and strike when we think it right and proper, that's what we want; and, miss, you tells the pores that be that if we don't get it the blood of the ex-workers will a'want to know the reason why and will flow red in the streets.

[*The door is flung open. MUGGS is startled.*]

MUGGS. Eh?

[TOMMY enters. *He is a small boy and carries a small toy engine.*]

TOMMY [*advancing to the desk*]. Please, Auntie Jane, can I play with my engine here? Isadora is taking up all the front room with her bricks.

JANE. Very well, dear, but don't make too much noise.

TOMMY. There ain't no noise nowadays.

MUGGS [*sighing*]. I liked a bit o' noise, I must say. Engine all right, son?

TOMMY [*who has gone extreme right and is sitting down to play with his toy*]. Perfect.

MUGGS [*sighing again as he sits down L.*]. Sure?

TOMMY. Yes, Mr Muggs.

[PERCY enters. *He is wearing gloves. He is normally a precious, languid youth of upper-class style, but at the moment he is angry. He shouts to someone outside.*]

PERCY. Spy! Fifth columnist.

[*Shuts door, comes forward and sits right of MUGGS.*]

JANE [*who is obviously in love with PERCY, rises*]. What's the matter?

PERCY [*wiping his forehead*]. Nothing.

MUGGS. Who's a spy?

PERCY. Your daughter.

MUGGS. You've said it.

JANE. Really the girl is incorrigible. [*She comes centre.*]

MUGGS. What can you expect? Give 'er some work to do, messin' about wiv' art and early primiteres. The only art she likes is the art of the films. She's a domestic, she is, and she used to have twenty plices in a year. That's experience if you like and it's all thrown away.

TOMMY [*busy at his engine*]. Shoo! Shoo!

PERCY. Be quiet, child.

MUGGS. Let 'im be, sir. It reminds me of the good old days when there was engens and smoke and noise and repairs. [*Softly*] Repairs!

JANE. Where was Lizzie Muggs spying?

PERCY [*now bored*]. Never mind.

[JANE returns and resumes her clerical work.]

MUGGS [*gazing at PERCY*]. I used ter envy you and your like, sir.

PERCY. I know you did.

MUGGS. Many a happy moment you gave me critercizin' you. The idle rich. Ha!

PERCY [*as he stretches his legs lazily*]. Not such fun now that you are one of them yourself?

MUGGS. I wonder you stuck it, sir.

PERCY. It wasn't such bad fun—when we were the select few. But what's the good of being idle and rich when everybody else is idle and rich too? It was jolly to saunter in the Park or lounge in a cocktail bar when you, Muggs, were delving deep in an ugly drain for leaks and leavings.

MUGGS. Yep, I didn't know me luck.

[JANE is now listening to hear their talk.]

PERCY [*dreamily*]. The sounds I loved in my garden were not the fluting of the blackbird or the buzzing of the bee, but the carpenter's hammer or the ploughman's "Whoa" or the curses of honest Muggs here as he wrestled with a refractory cistern. These familiar sounds gave zest to my

idleness and satisfaction to my dreams. Now that labour is vanishing, idleness is becoming a bore.

JANE. And don't forget boredom is a felony under the new act.

[LIZZIE MUGGS enters abruptly. She is commonly dressed, with loudish hat. She is a thin, tight-lipped girl of about 23 with sharp features and eyes, and her voice is common and shrill. As she enters they all rise except TOMMY, who gives another "Shoo. Shoo." LIZZIE looks round defiantly.]

JANE [facing her as she stands L. C. and sweetly]. I shall have to report you, Lizzie, if you're not careful.

MUGGS [going left and turning and facing her]. I 'ear you been spyin'.

LIZZIE [defiantly]. Yep, I 'ave.

MUGGS. You're lucky to be doin' anything.

JANE [sarcastically]. And where have you been spying?

LIZZIE [indignantly]. Listen to this, Dad. [Points to PERCY] He's been diggin'.

MUGGS [electrified]. Diggin' Where?

LIZZIE. On the allotments.

MUGGS. There ain't no more allotments.

PERCY. Let me explain.

MUGGS. Diggin' wiv a spide?

LIZZIE. Yep, and a fork and spittin' on 'is 'and and looking to see how the other feller was gettin' on. That's why he is wearin' gloves to protect 'is 'ands.

MUGGS. Well, I'm——

PERCY [as he resumes his seat]. The allotment is a museum piece.

JANE. It is part of a demonstration to show the terrible conditions under which food was produced in the old non-leisure days compared with our modern scientific era. We

had to find a labourer and Percy very kindly consented to play the part of a Tooting allotment holder.

MUGGS. Couldn't you have offered me a part? Diggin', holdin' a spade, muckin' up me hands. Why, miss?

LIZZIE. You ain't young and good-lookin', Dad.

MUGGS. Favritism.

JANE [*with dignity*]. You forget, Muggs, that Percy has stage experience.

MUGGS. Class distinslhuns. When there's a bit o' real 'ard work goin' about 'oo gets it? One of the pampered clarrses while a poor bloke loike me is put on to a golf course or sent to shoot 'em grouse which I cawn't abide while me poor daughter is made to tinkle away on the pianer at de hopposes of B. Hoven.

JANE. Lizzie, like every other young girl, has sufficient leisure for musical and other studies.

LIZZIE [*in an outburst as she strides up and down the room*]. Yep, me being educated as if I was a kid. With my experience! I started when I leaves school as a parlourmaid; then when me and the missis 'ad words I goes on the land; then I goes into a beauty parlour; then I goes back to being a parlourmaid; and when I 'as more words with another missis I becomes an usherette in a cinemar. I wants hard ungenial work which gives me a grievance and the right to leave quick when I likes. See?

PERCY. Don't shout, girl.

JANE. Do be reasonable, Lizzie. There is very little work of that sort to go round and there will be less and less as science, with its inexorable advance, progresses.

MUGGS. Why cawn't science go backwards for a change?

PERCY [*delighted*]. That's an idea. The scientist can't go back. That's where the despised crab has the pull over him.

LIZZIE [*standing C. and pointing finger at JANE*]. Besides, she's just as bad. I catches 'er last night scrubbing a floor and polishing pans.

JANE. It's part of the old-world exhibition. I too can act. I am cast for the part of a typical domestic servant, general type.

LIZZIE. You gives yourself and your boy friend there all the soft jobs, don't you?

JANE [*tearfully*]. You are most unfair.

MUGGS. Did the boy friend 'av beer after his diggin'?

PERCY. Of course. I tell you the exhibition is the real thing. [*Producing a phial and offering a tablet to MUGGS*] Have this one on me?

MUGGS [*taking the tablet*]. Beer?

PERCY. No. Concentrated bottled sunshine. Known in the bad old days as "bubbly." This vintage is a good year and takes only a month to mature.

MUGGS [*resignedly as he takes the tablet*]. All the best.

PERCY [*as he finishes his*]. Cheerio.

LIZZIE [*almost hysterically to JANE*]. Give me a dirty old job or I give notice, you graspin', cheatin', bossy——

JANE [*furiously*]. I shall report you at once to the Minister of Leisure. Don't forget your last sentence was six months on the Riviera.

LIZZIE [*attempting to be calm*]. Miss, I ask formelly 'ere now for a plice—a general maid ready to cook, clean, housemaid, parlourmaid——

JANE. You might as well ask for the moon.

LIZZIE. Then I demand the right to emigrate.

JANE. Where?

LIZZIE. Where there's work.

JANE. Try the moon.

LIZZIE. Do you mean to tell me there's no place in this

'ere globe where a respecttable girl with good references can't get a job ?

MUGGS. Or a plumber get some plumbin'—not nowhere ?

LIZZIE. Then I gives you notice that I ain't goin' on any more holidays, that I refuses to enter another cinemar for the next six months, that I 'ave as much right to scrub floors and polish pans and empty slops as any of the posh lot, and that I defy you and the Govermint to prevent me from workin'.

JANE. These are terrible words.

LIZZIE. I'm on strike and I insists on ten months' work in the year and holidays only when I wants them.

MUGGS. Easy, old girl.

JANE [*severely*]. You shall hear from the Ministry of Leisure within the next hour.

[*Makes for the door.*]

PERCY. Don't be too hard, Jane. Lizzie has been misled by her leaders.

[*Exit JANE.*]

PERCY [*to LIZZIE*]. You're for it, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. I don't care.

PERCY. I shouldn't be surprised you'll be put down for a world cruise.

MUGGS. Oh, my poor Liz !

LIZZIE [*staggered*]. A world cruise !

MUGGS. Go and put in a good word for her, old man.

PERCY [*to LIZZIE*]. Shall I ?

LIZZIE [*thinking hard*]. All right.

PERCY [*reprovingly, as he goes out*]. Satan finds some mischief still for busy hands to do.

[*Exit.*]

TOMMY [*looks up, and to MUGGS*]. I ain't going to allow you to play with my engine.

[*MUGGS takes no notice of the remark and sits down wearily centre.*]

TOMMY [*busy*]. Shoo ! Shoo !

LIZZIE [*looking to see that TOMMY is taking no notice, sits down on the floor beside her father ; eagerly*]. Dad, listen—now that I have them out of the road. Have you ever heard of a place called Lapland ?

MUGGS. Where the snow and the ice is ?

LIZZIE. Yep, and where there's somethin' else.

MUGGS. Blubber and bears ?

LIZZIE. Yep, and [*breathlessly*]*—and something else. [Dramatically]* Work !

MUGGS [*rising energetically*]. Work ? Lapland ! Let's be orf.

LIZZIE [*rising and pushing him back again and taking up her former position on the floor*]. Not a word. There's a flying boat sailin' to-night. The *Pilgrim Fathers*. She's going straight to Lapland. If we could sneak aboard.

MUGGS [*scarcely able to grasp the words*]. Work ! Wot kind o' work ?

LIZZIE. The real thing. Diggin'.

MUGGS. Diggin' ?

LIZZIE. Yep, and huntin' days and days for your food. And making holes in the ice for fish, and watchin', perishin' with cold, for a bite. There ain't no science or scarcely any worth mentionin', and there ain't no leisure or culteer. It's all 'ard work as in the dear old diys when England was England and the unemployed were unemployed, not because they were rich, but because they were poor.

MUGGS [*rising*]. Let's be orf.

LIZZIE [*rising*]. We must be careful. That sly Jane is on the track, I knows. She ain't got Governint influence for nothin' and I can see her and her boy-friend Eskeemoes before next week. Do you remember that boy-friend of mine, Tim Smith, whom I allowed to tinker wiv the car-

burettor of my new car when I pretended it wasn't okay. Well, he's on this new flyin' boat an' he might let us git aboard. He's just round the corner. Let's have a talk with him.

MUGGS. Let's 'ave a chat wiv yer boy-friend here and now.
[*He makes towards the door.*]

LIZZIE. Yes, but mum's the word.

[ISADORA *enters. She is a small girl with pigtails, carrying a huge box of toy bricks which she can scarcely manage.*]

ISADORA [*at the door shyly*]. I want to build my palace where there's people. There's nobody in there.

LIZZIE. Very well, dear ; I'm sure your Auntie Jane won't object.

TOMMY. Don't you come to my corner. This is a huge railway yard with factories alongside and my engine is going to take a goods train with pipes and props to the mine.

MUGGS. I wish it was.

ISADORA [*with dignity as she goes to the opposite corner, L.*]. My palace wouldn't be seen in such a neighbourhood.

LIZZIE. Fancy threatnin' me with the Riveera. [*At the door*] I've a good mind to write to the newspapers.

MUGGS [*joining her*]. There ain't any.

LIZZIE [*as they both go out*]. I do miss them, especially on Sundays. How I loved them with their huge columns of sitivations vacant and wanted.

MUGGS. Who told you about 'appy Lapland ?

LIZZIE. I 'eard Posh Percy there discussin' it with an explorer.

MUGGS. Work ! Disagreeable work ! It's 'eaven.

LIZZIE [*brusquely*]. You've said it.

[*Exeunt.*]

TOMMY [*looking up from his engine*]. I say, Isa, isn't it awful for them ? Nothing to do and plenty of time to do it in.

ISADORA. I wouldn't be grown up for anything.

TOMMY. You'll have to be one day.

ISADORA. I'm going to be a backward child with arrested growth.

TOMMY. Shoo ! Shoo !

ISADORA. Not so loud, boy. You are disturbing the Royal Family.

TOMMY. Is Lapland far off ?

ISADORA. Half an hour by stratosphere.

TOMMY. By golly, that's a bit of a journey.

ISADORA. What are they after in Lapland ?

TOMMY. A good time.

ISADORA. Will they get it ?

TOMMY. Do grown-ups ever get it ?

ISADORA. I read in a history book that not so long ago men and women had to work for their living.

TOMMY. Fairy tales.

ISADORA. Muggs himself told me.

TOMMY. He's dotty. Shoo ! Shoo !

[*Re-enter JANE and PERCY.*]

ISADORA [*looking up*]. I'm building my palace here. I hope you don't mind, Aunt Jane.

JANE. Not a bit, dear. [*Musing as she watches them busy at their play*] Happy, happy creatures. [*Standing centre with PERCY beside her*] Percy, I can't stick this much longer. I'm a civil servant and everything is so regulated that I can scarcely order anybody about.

[*She moves away R. in her despair.*]

PERCY [C.]. Let's clear out.

JANE. What's the good ? Scientific labour-saving is universal.

PERCY. Not in Lapland. If that boat starts to-night we're for aboard.

JANE. Do you really think there's work there?

PERCY. Heaps. And frightful work too. And if you don't work you starve and freeze to death.

JANE. Oh, Percy, how wonderful! But it can't be true. It's a dream. It's Utopia.

PERCY. Not yet.

TOMMY. Aunt Jane, do you know what we were told at school to-day?

JANE. Well, dear?

TOMMY. Do you know how long it takes to-day to plough, sow, harvest, and thresh a twenty-acre field of wheat? [*Triumphantly*] Half an hour.

JANE. Correct, dear.

TOMMY. And do you know how much labour is required?

ISADORA [*triumphantly*]. Minus four.

[*And the children are again busy.*]

JANE. But, Percy, there'll be a frightful rush.

PERCY [*as he sits down*]. Yes. The rumour is spreading and we'll have to be there early. In the old days there used to be emigration from religious persecution, or the tyranny of kings, or the threat of starvation, or the brutality of employers. But think of the rush there is going to be from leisure.

JANE. Oh, to be over-worked, underpaid, half-starved, crazy from competition, uncertain of your job! Percy, let's get to Lapland right now.

PERCY [*jumps up, goes to her*]. Right you are, darling.

[*But he hears steps outside and puts his finger to his lips.*]

LIZZIE and MUGGS re-enter.

MUGGS [*pretending to be nonchalant as he stands C.*]. Lovely minute for the harvest. [*He sits down, L.*]

LIZZIE [*nonchalantly*]. Daddy and me are thinking of going

down to see the old-fashioned agricultural show to-night, so I'm afraid we'll be late.

JANE. That's all right. Don't hurry. [*Severely to LIZZIE*] If Percy hadn't pleaded for you, Lizzie, I should have recommended for you a world cruise with three months at Hawaii for lessons in the ukelele, eighteen months' hard idling on Miami Beach, and a comprehensive course of detective fiction on board ship. As it is, you'll lose ten of your work coupons and go to Frinton and ten other tennis tournaments for thirty days.

[*A sort of blast from a radio.*]

TOMMY [*excitedly jumping up*]. A special wireless flash.

[*He goes right upstage and turns on radio.*]

VOICE. Special item of news. Lapland has decided to join the Federation of Workless Paradises. Work was officially abolished there to-day.

TOMMY [*returns to his toy, murmuring*]. That isn't very exciting.

[*The four grown-ups cannot conceal their despair. JANE sinks into chair R. LIZZIE turns away L. C. to hide her tears. MUGGS groans. PERCY, standing, rolls his eyes heavenward.*]

TOMMY [*suddenly giving yell of despair*]. My engine won't go. My engine's broken.

ISADORA [*contemptuously*]. I knew you would break it, clumsy.

TOMMY. You've been tinkerin' with it.

[*Rises, clutching his engine.*]

ISADORA. I have not.

TOMMY. Yes, you have, Interference.

[*And in a temper he dashes at the elaborate palace she has been making with the bricks, and with his feet scatters them.*]

ISADORA [*yelling in agony*]. Oh, my palace. My bootiful palace.

MUGGS [*rises and approaches TOMMY, C.*]. Let's have a look, son.

JANE [*goes to ISADORA's corner*]. Never mind, darling. Let me help to rebuild. [*And she sits down beside ISADORA.*]

MUGGS [*examining the engine*]. Why, it is broken. [*He is excited.*] That bogie wheel is twisted and the piston is loose.

PERCY [*who has approached the scattered bricks.*]. That's not the way to start, Jane darling.

MUGGS. Yes, this is a bit of a problem all right.

[*He is examining the engine carefully.*]

TOMMY [*uneasily*]. Let me put it right myself.

MUGGS [*edging away with the engine*]. No, no, this is an hexpert business. What a bit o' luck I'm here.

PERCY [*testily*]. That's not the way, I tell you. I'll show you.

JANE [*testily*]. Do leave us alone, Percy. Can't you see I'm busy?

ISADORA [*crowding round the two kneeling figures*]. Please, can I have my bricks?

PERCY. There, I told you, a rotten start. The whole thing will be top-heavy.

ISADORA. I want to build my palace myself.

JANE [*very busy with bricks*]. Keep away, you ungrateful child. Can't you see I'm helping you?

PERCY. You're doing nothing of the kind. You are ruining the whole caboodle. Now give me those bricks there for the foundations and I'll show you.

[*LIZZIE is now hovering round.*]

TOMMY [*making a last desperate effort*]. Please, Mr Muggs

MUGGS. 'Ere, you keep orf, young 'un.

JANE [*giving PERCY a push*]. Don't shove.

ISADORA [*weeping*]. It's my bricks and my palace.

LIZZIE [*who is now close to the kneeling couple*]. Here, where do I come in all this?

PERCY. This is not your affair.

LIZZIE. Isn't it?

[*She kneels down and snatches some bricks from the angry JANE while PERCY pushes away the crying ISADORA.*

MUGGS [*suddenly puts down engine, driving away TOMMY. He takes off his coat and rolls up his sleeves. Triumphantly*]. A job at last.

[*There is a fracas among the other three at the bricks while ISADORA dances hysterically round them.*

CURTAIN

“WANTED—MR STUART”

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

by
Arthur Watkyn

CHARACTERS

SIR EDGAR HARCOURT
PHILIP MAUNSELL
SERGEANT TRYON
ROBERT
THE LANDLORD

The Coffee-room of the White Hart, Evesham, on
the Worcester Road. September 10, 1651.

ARTHUR WATKYN, after coming down from Oxford, had his plays *Cavalier* and *Backward Boy* produced at the Oxford Repertory Theatre, and later *Muted Strings (A Romance of Beethoven)* was presented at Daly's Theatre, London, with Keneth Kent and Violet Vanbrugh in the cast.

He has also written a number of successful plays for the radio, including *The Haslewood Diamond*, *Hawkmoor Farm*, and *The Portsmouth Road*. "*Wanted—Mr Stuart*" has also been broadcast, and it shows him as a playwright with a very keen sense of the theatre.

“WANTED—MR STUART”¹

SCENE : *The Coffee-room of The White Hart, Evesham, September 10, 1651.*

Double doors up C. lead to the parlour. The fireplace is in the L. wall, with an armchair above and a smaller chair below it. There is a large sideboard against the R. wall, and a table C. stage.

ROBERT, a waiter, has just shown in SIR EDGAR HARCOURT.

A confused din of voices is heard from the adjoining room.

ROBERT [*above the table C.*]. You'll find it's quieter in here, sir.

HARCOURT [*by the fireplace*]. Quieter ! I can hardly hear myself speak. Shut those doors.

ROBERT. They are shut, sir.

HARCOURT. What a circus ! I've tried three times to get a drink, four to get a room . . .

ROBERT. I'll see about a room, sir.

HARCOURT. If that inferno's going on, you can save your breath. Where's the landlord ?

ROBERT. He's serving, sir.

HARCOURT. Inform him Sir Edgar Harcourt has arrived. If that doesn't stir him, you can saddle my horses and I'll be off.

ROBERT [*moving up to the doors*]. Yes, sir.

HARCOURT. And bring me a dry sack.

[*ROBERT exit. The LANDLORD enters up C.*

LANDLORD [*C.*]. Sir Edgar, forgive us. We don't know where to turn. [*He comes to up stage R. of the table.*

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

HARCOURT [*moving to L. of the table*]. Your inn's a bear garden, man

LANDLORD. It's the Ironsides. Returning every hour from Worcester. Troopers, cavalry, garrisons.

HARCOURT. And they call this peace !

LANDLORD. I'll get you a room at the back.

HARCOURT. You'll get me some dinner.

LANDLORD. Yes, Sir Edgar.

HARCOURT. Soup, venison, capon.

LANDLORD. Venison, capon.

HARCOURT. Your best Château-Latour.

LANDLORD. Château-Latour.

HARCOURT. Stilton and malmsey.

LANDLORD. At once, sir. And you'll bear with us to-night . . .

HARCOURT. Plague on it, man, I'm a Roundhead. I'll drink with your rabble. To Cromwell and victory !

LANDLORD. Cromwell and victory.

HARCOURT. Where's my chair ?

LANDLORD. By the fire, sir.

HARCOURT. And the cards ?

LANDLORD. On the mantel.

HARCOURT [*with a sigh, as he moves back towards the fireplace*]. Cromwell and victory ! Well, we've waited long enough for it. Ten years to put these scoundrels in their place.

LANDLORD. We've seen the last of them now, sir.

HARCOURT. We've seen the last of more than them, Henry. [*In a quieter tone*] We've seen the last of . . . Charles Stuart. [*He laughs softly to himself.*] A corpse on the field of Worcester ! There'll never be a king in England again.

LANDLORD. Never a king in England.

[ROBERT enters with the sack.

ROBERT. The gentleman's sack.

LANDLORD [*R. of table*]. Put it on the table, Robert. And order Sir Edgar's dinner. Soup, venison, and Château-Latour.

ROBERT [*putting the sack on the table*]. Yes, sir.

LANDLORD. And keep those doors closed.

ROBERT [*as he goes up stage*]. Yes, sir. [*He goes out.*]

HARCOURT [*moving to the table for his drink*]. Well, it's good to see you, even in this bedlam . . .

LANDLORD. Sir Edgar . . .

HARCOURT. What is it ?

[*There is a slight pause.*]

LANDLORD. There's no question, is there . . . about Prince Charles . . . ?

HARCOURT. Question ?

LANDLORD. I mean, it is quite certain ?

HARCOURT. What the plague do you mean ?

LANDLORD. I'd like to have it from your own lips.

HARCOURT [*testily*]. Charles Stuart's body was identified on the field of Worcester. He was thrown from his horse and cut down.

[*There is a pause.*]

Does that satisfy you ?

LANDLORD. Yes, Sir Edgar.

HARCOURT. Then why do you ask ?

[*He goes back to the fire.*]

LANDLORD. Because in the parlour they are wagering thrée sovereigns to one . . . that he is alive

[*PHILIP MAUNSELL enters.*]

MAUNSELL. Is this coffee-room private . . . ?

LANDLORD. No, sir. This way, if you please.

MAUNSELL [*coming down to C. above the table*]. Your parlour's a little rowdy.

HARCOURT. Charles Stuart alive !

LANDLORD. Yes, sir.

HARCOURT. Are they out of their senses ?

MAUNSELL. Why should they be ?

HARCOURT. I beg your pardon.

MAUNSELL. I said " why should they be ? "

HARCOURT. I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance.

MAUNSELL. My name is Philip Maunsell. In Tewkesbury they're laying four to one.

[There is a moment's silence.]

HARCOURT. Four . . . to one !

MAUNSELL. Yes.

HARCOURT. That Charles Stuart is alive ?

MAUNSELL. Yes.

HARCOURT. It's preposterous !

MAUNSELL. No doubt.

HARCOURT. Fantastic ! The body's been identified——

MAUNSELL. They say it was his double.

HARCOURT. His double . . .

MAUNSELL. A special bodyguard. The Prince was seen crossing the Severn the same evening—and two days after in Ludlow.

HARCOURT. What's the evidence ?

MAUNSELL. Sentries on the river, townsfolk in Ludlow.

HARCOURT. Why have they kept silent ?

MAUNSELL. They haven't. They were hushed up.

HARCOURT. It's a lie ! A fraud, I tell you, set about by Royalists to keep their cause alive. Charles Stuart's body rots on the field of Worcester.

MAUNSELL. I'll lay you five to one it does not.

HARCOURT. Five to one !

MAUNSELL. Here in this room.

HARCOURT. I don't wager, sir.

MAUNSELL. A pity.

HARCOURT. If I did, I'd wager you a hundred sovereigns—that it does.

MAUNSELL. A pretty sum ! Couldn't the landlord introduce us ?

HARCOURT. I'll trouble you, sir, not to be flippant on this matter. If there's one spark of truth in the rumour you're spreading, a shadow lies over England. The dawn of peace is being blotted out . . .

MAUNSELL. That's a matter of opinion, sir.

HARCOURT. Opinion, sir !

MAUNSELL. Charles was a gay prince. He should be alive, to keep the Roundheads on their mettle.

HARCOURT. Treason, I say !

LANDLORD. Now, gentlemen——

HARCOURT [*stepping L. C.*]. A sword.

LANDLORD. Sir Edgar !

MAUNSELL [*putting up his hand*]. One moment, sir. If you would do me an injury . . . why not rob me of five hundred sovereigns ?

HARCOURT. Five hundred . . .

MAUNSELL [*quietly*]. I'll take your wager . . . at my odds.

HARCOURT. I've already told you——

MAUNSELL. I am a poor man. I'd feel five hundred more than your sword.

[There is a slight pause.]

HARCOURT. You would, sir ?

[HARCOURT faces MAUNSELL.]
Very well, then. I'll not rob you of five hundred. I'll rob you of five thousand.

LANDLORD. Five thousand . . .

HARCOURT. I'll wager you a thousand sovereigns to five . . . that Charles Stuart is dead.

LANDLORD. Sir Edgar, I implore you——

HARCOURT. Keep out of this, Henry ! [*He turns to MAUNSELL.*] You hear me, sir ? One thousand sovereigns to five that Charles Stuart is dead.

MAUNSELL. I hear you, sir. [*After a pause*] There is one small point. How will the wager be decided ?

HARCOURT. In this way. If Charles Stuart is not proved alive in a fortnight, he will be taken as dead.

MAUNSELL. If Charles is not proved alive in a fortnight, he will be taken as dead.

HARCOURT. Is that clear ?

MAUNSELL. Quite clear.

HARCOURT. Is the wager taken ?

[*There is a slight pause.*]

MAUNSELL. Taken.

[*There is a moment's silence. The two men stand facing each other.*]

HARCOURT. My name is Edgar Harcourt. My residence Cheveley Manor, Devizes. I shall return there to-morrow.

MAUNSELL. I am Philip Maunsell. I live at seventeen High Holborn in the City of London. I am at your service.

HARCOURT. Landlord, you are witness to this wager.

LANDLORD. But, gentlemen, I implore . . .

VOICE [*from the parlour*]. In the name of the Parliament of England . . . silence for a proclamation of Hampton Court.

HARCOURT. What the plague——

VOICE. Given under the hand of Oliver Cromwell, 'Commander-in-Chief of the Puritan Forces.

[*The sound of voices dies to a murmur.*]

HARCOURT. Open those doors.

[*The LANDLORD moves up and opens the doors. MAUNSELL moves away R.*]

SERGEANT TRYON. "WANTED—MR STUART."

HARCOURT [*below his breath*] . . . Dear heaven . . .

SERGEANT. "Whereas it is commonly accepted that Charles Stuart, Leader of the Royalist Forces, was cut down and left for dead on the field of Worcester, a measure of doubt now exists. Evidence has been received that Mr Stuart crossed the Severn on the night of September 3 and was seen two days later in the town of Ludlow. Mr Stuart may be at large or in hiding in the counties of Worcester, Shropshire, Hereford, or Oxford.

"For his capture or information leading thereto a reward of one thousand pounds. For concealing his whereabouts or aiding and abetting his movements the penalty of death.

"Given under our seal.

"Hampton Court.

"September 9, 1651."

HARCOURT [*faltering*]. It isn't possible . . . it can't be . . .

SERGEANT. Troopers Britton and Fox, search the inn.

HARCOURT. At large or in hiding . . .

LANDLORD [*hastily*]. Excuse me, gentlemen.

MAUNSELL. Close those doors.

[*The LANDLORD goes out, closing the doors. There is a moment's pause.*]

One thousand sovereigns . . .

HARCOURT. Nothing is proved, I tell you !

MAUNSELL. Nothing yet.

HARCOURT. It's a trick, a Royalist scare . . .

MAUNSELL. No doubt.

HARCOURT. It'll break down, they'll have to confess.

MAUNSELL. Shall we increase the wager ?

HARCOURT. We'll increase nothing . . .

[*ROBERT enters up C.*]

MAUNSELL. Ah, waiter, a drink.

ROBERT. Glass of sack, sir ?

MAUNSELL. Two glasses.

HARCOURT [*to ROBERT*]. What's—what's happening in there?

ROBERT. They're searching the inn, sir.

HARCOURT. This inn!

ROBERT. Yes, sir.

HARCOURT. Do they imagine he's here?

ROBERT. They're searching every inn in the country.

HARCOURT. Satan, don't they know what the man looks like? He wears a full-bottomed wig, a moustache no gentleman would dare, has black eyes, sunken cheeks, and a lecherous gait—you could pick him out of a thousand. And they're looking for him here!

ROBERT. Yes, sir.

HARCOURT. Well, tell 'em they're mad! Mad, d'ye hear me? If they want Charles Stuart, they'll have to dig for him.

ROBERT. Yes, sir.

MAUNSELL. And bring two dry sacks.

[ROBERT goes out.]

HARCOURT. Raving mad . . .

MAUNSELL [*after a pause*]. You know, Sir Edgar, it wouldn't be out of the question to shave off that moustache.

HARCOURT. Let him shave it!

MAUNSELL. Or to remove a full-bottomed wig.

HARCOURT. Remove it!

MAUNSELL. It would make a difference.

HARCOURT. He can't change his face.

MAUNSELL [*thoughtfully*]. I don't know. Wax and plaster have worked wonders. I heard of a Huguenot who lived two years in his own town unrecognized. The Marquis de Charron served as a footman at the Tuileries under sentence of exile.

HARCOURT. This is England, sir ! We've eyes in our heads.
MAUNSELL. We shall need them.

[SERGEANT TRYON *enters*.

SERGEANT. Your names, gentlemen . . .

HARCOURT [*sharply*]. Who the devil are you, sir ?

SERGEANT. Sergeant Tryon of the Oxford Garrison. In the name of the Parliament——

HARCOURT. Now look here——

SERGEANT. Names, business, and destination.

HARCOURT. If you think you've come to any purpose——

SERGEANT. I must trouble you, sir.

MAUNSELL. Philip Maunsell of High Holborn, London. Gentleman. Travelling to Shrewsbury.

SERGEANT. When did you arrive ?

MAUNSELL. Five minutes ago.

SERGEANT. On horse ?

MAUNSELL. Post-chaise.

SERGEANT. And leaving ?

MAUNSELL. To-morrow.

SERGEANT [*to* HARCOURT]. Yours, sir ?

HARCOURT. Edgar Harcourt. Knight. Cheveley Manor, Devizes.

SERGEANT. Arrived ?

HARCOURT. This moment.

SERGEANT. A guest ?

HARCOURT. For the night. Now look here——

SERGEANT. Have you knowledge of the whereabouts of Charles Stuart ?

HARCOURT. First hand.

SERGEANT. What is it ?

HARCOURT. Feeding the worms of Worcester.

SERGEANT. Speak to the point, sir.

HARCOURT. It is the point, sir.

SERGEANT. Then it may interest you to know . . . that Charles Stuart was reported last night . . . in this town.

[*There is a moment's complete silence.*]

HARCOURT. In this town !

SERGEANT. You heard me.

MAUNSELL [*after a pause*]. Has he been seen ?

SERGEANT. No.

MAUNSELL. Then how——

SERGEANT. A Royalist gave evidence in Hereford. [*He pauses.*] The town is being searched from top to bottom. No one may enter or leave without consent. If he is here, we shall get him. [*He turns to the door.*] That is all, gentlemen. Good night.

[*He goes out. The two men stand facing each other.*]

The LANDLORD hurries in.

LANDLORD. Forgive me, gentlemen. I was detained by the Sergeant. Your drinks are coming . . .

MAUNSELL. You heard, landlord, what he said ?

LANDLORD. The Prince reported in Evesham ! It sounds like a fable . . .

HARCOURT [*mechanically*]. A fable . . .

MAUNSELL. Where do you imagine he could be ?

LANDLORD. I don't know, sir. There are some great houses in the neighbourhood. The Trevors, the Mainwarings, the Blakeneyes. They'll be turned inside out. God help them, if they find him.

MAUNSELL. God help me, landlord . . . if they don't !

LANDLORD. You, sir ?

MAUNSELL. I shall lose five thousand pounds.

LANDLORD. Five thousand pounds . . .

MAUNSELL. Have you forgotten . . . the wager ?

LANDLORD. By our Lady, sir !

MAUNSELL. If Charles is not found alive in a fortnight, I have lost. Those are the terms, Sir Edgar ?

HARCOURT. Those are the terms.

MAUNSELL. So Godspeed to the arrest of Charles !

LANDLORD. Godspeed . . .

MAUNSELL. And I tell you, he won't make it easy He's the cleverest man in England and will beat us yet.

LANDLORD. He won't beat me, sir.

HARCOURT. Nor me.

MAUNSELL. He's beaten us all for a week. Slipped through four counties and kept an army guessing . . . Why ? [*He faces them.*] I'll tell you. Because they are looking for a ghost. They are looking for the ghost of Charles Stuart. And there is not one shred or vestige of Charles Stuart left. Every item has been changed, clothes, voice, features, gait, character, every mark and detail of the man we know . . . [*his voice dropping*] except one . . . [*He pauses.*] The one thing a man may never change, because he does not know he possesses it.

HARCOURT. What is that ?

[*ROBERT enters with drinks*

ROBERT. The gentlemen's drinks. . . .

LANDLORD. On the table, Robert.

HARCOURT. What is that ?

MAUNSELL. A mannerism . . .

[*There is a pause. He smiles quietly at them. ROBERT puts the drinks on the table.*

Some trick of the hand, flicker of an eyelid, unknown to each of us and with us all our days. . . . Charles Stuart has a mannerism.

[*MAUNSELL and HARCOURT go to the table for their drink.*

ROBERT crosses L. to attend to the fire.

LANDLORD. He has !

HARCOURT. What is it ?

MAUNSELL [*smiling*]. There's a reward . . . for the answer.

LANDLORD. But if you know—

HARCOURT [*sharply*]. How do you know ?

MAUNSELL. I was two years in the Palace of Whitehall, tutor to Prince Henry. I had time to observe . . . Prince Charles.

HARCOURT. It is your duty to the Parliament to speak.

MAUNSELL [*gently*]. My duty is to myself . . . for six thousand.

HARCOURT. Then there's no fear you'll forget it.

MAUNSELL [*smiling*]. No fear. And yet, Sir Edgar, I wonder . . .

HARCOURT. Wonder, sir !

MAUNSELL. Whether posterity would approve.

HARCOURT. This is treason.

LANDLORD [*between them*]. Sir Edgar—

HARCOURT. Explain yourself !

MAUNSELL. A man who can defy England for a week . . . has the makings of a king.

HARCOURT. I tell you, sir, England has tired of kings.

MAUNSELL. She has tired of tyranny. She will never tire of kings. The people will respect a Parliament—they will die for a king. [*Putting down his empty glass*] Shall we go in to supper ?

HARCOURT. I think it is high time.

[*He puts down his glass.*]

LANDLORD [*moving up*]. I'll show you to your rooms . . .

HARCOURT [*about to follow, but stops*]. And one last word, sir. I thank Heaven that the betrayal of a king will save you six thousand sovereigns. It assures me our Parliament is safe.

LANDLORD. This way, sir . . .

[HARCOURT goes out, followed by the LANDLORD. There is a moment's silence.

MAUNSELL [*smiling, as he comes L. C.*]. Sir Edgar under-rates me. He values "a dream" at six thousand. Don't you reckon that cheap, Robert?

ROBERT [*L.*]. I see his point of view, sir.

MAUNSELL. You see his point of view. Then I am a fool and a fanatic. [*He moves away to R. C.*] Do you read Mr Shakespeare?

ROBERT. Mr Shakespeare, sir?

MAUNSELL. A playwright who died thirty years ago.

ROBERT. I'm afraid not, sir.

MAUNSELL [*turning, R. C.*]. He has a line in *The Prince of Denmark* . . . Ophelia, speaking of Prince Hamlet, says :

The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form . . .

Could you betray . . . such a one?

ROBERT [*L. C.*]. I'm afraid I could, sir.

MAUNSELL. You could?

ROBERT. His father was a traitor. Like father, like son.

MAUNSELL. Cold logic, Robert. May it reap its reward. The way to the supper-room?

ROBERT [*moving up to L. of the doors*] This way, sir.

[MAUNSELL goes to the door and turns.

MAUNSELL. And by the way, Robert, when you do your fell deed . . . perhaps you will inform the King that there was one man who would not betray him . . . for six thousand pounds.

ROBERT. I will inform him, sir.

MAUNSELL. Tell me, Robert, do you believe that?

ROBERT. I'm afraid, sir, you would have to prove it.

MAUNSELL. It has been my privilege.

[He pauses, his hand on the door, facing ROBERT]

[To ROBERT] Good night . . . your Majesty.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE HEROIC MOULD

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

by
W. Templeton Law

CHARACTERS

MRS HUSHETT, *charwoman*

MR WILLS, *clerk*

MISS BOYDEN, *clerk*

MR HARKER, *departmental manager*

MISS LENNART, *secretary*

MR COOMBES, *from another departmen*

WILLIAM TEMPLETON LAW, at present serving in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, is a native of Glasgow, where he is well known as an amateur actor and producer.

He has written a number of interesting plays for various drama festivals, and *The Heroic Mould* has already had several very successful productions.

THE HEROIC MOULD¹

SCENE is the outer office in a buying department of a big firm of East India merchants. Down R. is the door of entry, and opposite, but farther up stage, is a door with a glass upper-half marked *PRIVATE*. This gives access to the departmental manager's room. The back wall has two windows through which one may glimpse a jumble of rooftops and chimneys. In front of each window is a sloping desk and a stool. There is a typist's table and chair below the private door and an ordinary small table and chair above the entrance door. On L. a book-rack.

The curtain goes up on the grey light of morning before the staff have arrived. MRS HUSHETT, a charwoman, has for some time been busy on this her last job on the top floor. She has her back to the audience and is flicking a duster over the right-hand desk. Presently she turns, and coming down to the typist's desk bestows a tired touch here and there about its corners.

The entrance door is opened by MR WILLS, who comes in and goes to his desk on the right. MR WILLS is young and pale and thoughtful, and wears glasses. He carries a small attaché-case. He greets MRS HUSHETT on his way up stage.

MR WILLS. Good morning, Mrs Hushett.

MRS HUSHETT. Mornin', Mr Wills. . . . Is it dry yet?

MR WILLS. Oh yes—dry again.

[He stoops away his case and takes some pens and blotting-paper out of his desk.]

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

MRS HUSHETT [*flopping down in the typist's chair and regarding her feet*]. Thank goodness ! . . . They boots is lettin' in.

[*She raises her eyes and watches him expectantly as he reaches up and takes down a calendar of the tear-off leaflet type from its nail between the windows. It is a daily rite both enjoy. MR WILLS tears off the top leaf, and dropping it in a basket at his side resumes his stool with the calendar in his hands, and faces MRS HUSHETT.*

MRS HUSHETT. Well, what does it say this mornin' ?

MR WILLS [*reading slowly and clearly*]. "Poverty is never a disgrace, but it is often very inconvenient."

MRS HUSHETT. That's very true . . . 'specially the last bit.

MR WILLS. The last bit, Mrs Hushett, is only an insult. . . . We can pass that over. But the first bit is a confounded lie, and we must get that clear.

MRS HUSHETT. It sounded true as a bell to me . . . like a proverb. . . . "Honest poverty" . . . what was it Rabbie said ?

MR WILLS. I don't remember, but—

MRS HUSHETT. More's the pity . . . Rabbie kent a' about it.

MR WILLS. He knew enough, anyhow, never to say anything like that [*tapping the calendar with a finger*]. Poverty, Mrs Hushett, as you and I know it in this city to-day, is a disgrace to a civilized community.

MRS HUSHETT [*not to be rushed into accepting a bald statement*]. Well . . . imphm . . .

MR WILLS [*taking the floor*]. Is it not a disgrace that you, a widow with a young family, having done your duty nobly as a citizen, should be forced to this kind of work to keep yourself and your children from the poorhouse ?

MRS HUSHETT. Well . . . maybe it's hard lines.

MR WILLIS. Hard lines ! . . . Mrs Hushett, sometimes I despair of you altogether.

MRS HUSHETT. Tuts !

MR WILLIS. Every morning except Sundays, since that calendar was put up, you and I have started the day by reading its daily motto and——

MRS HUSHETT. Half a minute ! . . . I start the day sweepin' out the sample-room.

MR WILLIS. One up to you. . . . What I want to say is this : in the little discussions we've had I've often been delighted by your gift of seizing the truth of the matter and saying something really helpful ; but there are times when you are positively perverse——

MRS HUSHETT. Tuts !

MR WILLIS. —and that is when we're probing some social evil of which you personally are the victim.

MRS HUSHETT. Are you saying I'm the victim of poverty ?

MR WILLIS. Mrs Hushett, you're a Frenchman for logic. . . . Yes, I'm saying just that. . . . You and millions more in this country to-day !

MRS HUSHETT. And poverty's a social evil . . . imphm . . . it's funny.

MR WILLIS. What's funny about it ?

MRS HUSHETT. Well, there's cranks that call drink a social evil . . . and then there's gambling.

MR WILLIS. These are lesser evils. . . . Behind them both stands poverty—the cause—the source. . . .

MRS HUSHETT. Millionaires get drunk—aye, and they gamble too !

MR WILLIS. Of course they do, but for different reasons. I'm talking about the working class. I'm only asking you to admit that your life is a hard one . . . unduly hard after

all the service you've given the community. . . . Perhaps it will be left to your children, with all the benefits of modern education, to—

MRS HUSHETT. Education ! [*Setting her mouth grimly*] Now there's something I *can* talk about !

MR WILLS. Well ?

MRS HUSHETT. You didn't ask me how I enjoyed the church social last night.

MR WILLS. No . . . my mind doesn't flop about like a fish in a basket.

MRS HUSHETT. Well, I nearly didn't enjoy it ; and all because education isn't what it's cracked up to be.

MR WILLS. How do you make that out ?

MRS HUSHETT. That young sinner o' mine—Sammy . . . I feed him and clead him and send him to school . . . and at twelve year old he canna read.

MR WILLS. What happened ?

MRS HUSHETT. Yesterday was Thursday—that's the day I'm late and don't get in till half-past six. As usual, I gave him the key at dinner-time, and off he went to school. Before I went out I left a note on the table tellin' him what to do when he came in at four. It wasn't much. The fire was set, and my good new boots—only four times on—were sittin' on the fender. . . . I said in the note, "Light fire. Brush boots."

MR WILLS. Well, it sounds easy. Didn't he do it ?

MRS HUSHETT [*in an agonized voice*]. He lighted the fire . . . and then *burnt* the boots. [*She gets up.*]

MR WILLS. Oh, I say . . . what rotten luck !

MRS HUSHETT. And I had to go to the social in my old hasbeens. . . . But, talkin' about fires . . . d'you think he'll want one this morning ?

MR WILLS. Who ?

MRS HUSHETT [*indicating the private room with a thumb*].
Mr Harker.

MR WILLS. Hard to say. You never can tell what he'll want.

MRS HUSHETT. Ah well, I'll put some coal in. The bucket's just outside. [*She moves to the door and goes out.*]

[MR WILLS goes over to the book-rack and takes out a weighty ledger which he carries back to his desk. He turns over a few pages briskly. MRS HUSHETT returns with a coal bucket piled high. In her passage across, the bucket tilts accidentally and two or three lumps fall to the floor. By the time she gets down on her knees to retrieve them MR WILLS is at her side, also on his knees, picking them up.]

MRS HUSHETT. Tuts now, Mr Wills, you'll get your hands dirty.

MR WILLS. And why shouldn't I? . . . That's what hands are for—to get dirty honestly and be washed clean again.

MRS HUSHETT. That's all very fine and large . . . but it's not for the likes of you.

MR WILLS. The likes of me! Mrs Hushett, make a note of this: I represent just about the lowest dregs of the labouring class.

MRS HUSHETT. Mr Wills! . . . What a thing to say! . . . and you with a fine job in the city, doin' brain-work.

MR WILLS. Save the mark!

MRS HUSHETT. And talk as you like you'll just end up wi' gettin' your bonny ledger dirty.

[MISS BOYDEN enters from R. She is young and dark and practical, dressed in a business-like overall. She carries a hand-bag, and wears a modest engagement ring. On her way over to the left-hand desk she stops to regard the kneeling pair.]

MR WILLS. Ah, Mrs Hushett, if you could just grasp the idea of mutual help . . . the idea of service. . . . Do you know what a Soviet is ?

MISS BOYDEN. Am I interrupting your devotions ?

MRS HUSHETT. Oh, Miss Boyden . . . there you are. . . . Mr Wills was just giving me a hand . . . with the coals, you know.

[Both rise to their feet. MR WILLS, wiping his fingers on his handkerchief, goes to his desk and pretends to resume an important task. MRS HUSHETT takes up her bucket and goes into the private room. There is a moment of awkward silence.]

MISS BOYDEN. Well ?

MR WILLS. Well ?

MISS BOYDEN. I said it first.

MR WILLS. Don't be angry, Jenny.

MISS BOYDEN. I'm not.

MR WILLS. Well . . . that's all right.

MISS BOYDEN. You weren't at the Dramatic Club last night.

MR WILLS. No. . . . Somehow or other I just couldn't face it in the mood I was in. . . . The thing we're doing this year gives me a pain—drawing-room drivel and bedroom bilge. . . . It isn't life !

MISS BOYDEN. You'd have found more than a rehearsal. . . . I was there, waiting for you . . . expecting you.

MR WILLS. I'm sorry about that, of course.

[MRS HUSHETT comes from the private room carrying a broom. She crosses to the other door, and, as she reaches it, turns and speaks.]

MRS HUSHETT. Well, good mornin' to you both. Don't let him make a Bolshevik of you, Miss Boyden.

[She goes out.]

MISS BOYDEN. Do you think I appreciate that kind of remark from the office charwoman?

MR WILLS. There was no great harm in it that I could see.

MISS BOYDEN. There's no harm at all in Mrs Hushett; she's a good old soul. What I do resent is that you have made it possible for remarks like that to come from anyone in the building.

MR WILLS. I'm afraid I don't quite see——

MISS BOYDEN. Well, never mind that now. [*Going over to him*] But listen a moment, Tom. There's something else I want to say now . . . something I want to ask you.

MR WILLS. All right; go ahead.

MISS BOYDEN. We're engaged to be married, Tom, aren't we?

MR WILLS. Why, yes . . . of course.

MISS BOYDEN. And we've managed to save a bit——

MR WILLS. Not very much, I'm afraid.

MISS BOYDEN. Enough for what I'm thinking of, Tom! . . . Let's clear out of this mouldy office and start a shop. Before Father sold out I used to manage his. No one can teach me anything about the newsagent and tobacconist business. We could get married right away and work together, and I know we'd get on——

MR WILLS. Now, Jenny dear, we've been over all that before . . . and you know I hate discussing these things here in the office.

MISS BOYDEN. I want you to say something definite now.

MR WILLS. We can't talk here without being interrupted. Miss Lennart or the boss may be in any moment . . . and leaving things half-said is worse than not saying them at all.

MISS BOYDEN. I want to know now.

MR WILLS. Jenny, be reasonable. It's too big a step to take on the spur of the moment.

MISS BOYDEN. Are you prepared to leave this office with me and go into business?

MR WILLS [*after a pause*]. No . . . I'm not. . . . It's too uncertain. I'm thinking of you principally when I say that. But I'll be quite frank : I'd hate to be a shopkeeper, anyhow.

MISS BOYDEN. That's got something to do with your politics, hasn't it?

MR WILLS. Possibly it has ; but it's only a secondary consideration.

MISS BOYDEN. Then it boils down to this : you don't think it's worth the risk?

MR WILLS. I think the risk too great, considering I'm in steady employment here.

MISS BOYDEN. I see. . . . Well, then, I think marriage would be too big a risk as long as you *are* employed here . . . unless some change occurs.

MR WILLS. What do you mean?

MISS BOYDEN. I'm going to be frank now, Tom—I mean that you're not much good at your job.

{MR WILLS *is aghast, but says nothing.*

MISS BOYDEN. I'm sorry if that hurts you, Tom, but it has worried me for months. I've watched you day after day. You're not paying attention. Half the time you're dreaming . . . gazing out of the window, letting things slide, making blunders and getting old Harker down on you like a load of bricks. That's what mooning about Soviet Russia has done for you ! . . . It hasn't made *you* a worker, anyway. You spend hours every week exchanging theories with Miss Lenart, and whenever Freddie Coombes comes up it's a signal to stop everything and talk politics—though you can't see he's just baiting you. . . . No, Tom ! It won't do. It can

only end one way. . . . Well, what have you got to say ?

MR WILLS [*after an audible sigh*]. Thank heaven you're not the boss !

MISS BOYDEN. I'm afraid it won't be long before Mr Harker does what I'd do now if I were.

MR WILLS [*with mild interest*]. And that is—— ?

MISS BOYDEN. Sack you on the spot ! . . . Oh, Tom, I almost wish he would ! I'd leave too ; then we could start. What you want is something to interest you. . . . Working for your own profit. . . .

MR WILLS. Oh, please don't begin all over again.

MISS BOYDEN. Very well. . . . I won't reason any more with you. I'll just do anything I can to help you—out of your job. . . . I mean it. [*She touches her ring*] This little jewel is just an ornament meantime. Things have got to change before it can mean any more.

[*The entrance door opens to admit MR HARKER. He is of middle age, wears a hat and coat, and has spats over his shoes. He carries his head a little on one side—a mannerism of abstraction. He crosses and enters his room, with a brusque greeting.*

MR HARKER. Good morning.

MISS BOYDEN. Good morning, Mr Harker.

MR WILLS. Morning. . . . Jenny, did you seriously mean what you said just now ?

MISS BOYDEN [*crossing to the book-rack and taking out a book*]. Have you got the makers' case-marks and numbers ready for next month's shipments ?

MR WILLS. Confound the case-marks and numbers ! Answer my question.

MISS BOYDEN. That's the stuff to give them, Tom ! . . . They'll write asking for them when it's too late, and then

we'll have a few nice Chamber-of-Commerce claims for late shipment. That would just about do the trick.

[She returns to her desk.]

MR WILLIS. It would be my own affair anyhow. . . . But to think that you would actually go out of your way to—

MISS BOYDEN. Perhaps I won't need to ; but if the worst comes to the worst—

[A bell rings in the inner room. MISS BOYDEN goes in ; a moment's pause and she returns.]

Miss Lennart not in yet ?

MR WILLIS *[abruptly]*. Can't say.

MISS BOYDEN. I wouldn't be surprised if she joined you soon at the Labour Exchange. Old Harker's straining at the leash. Wants some letters done.

MR WILLIS. Look here, Jenny, do you honestly think I'm a failure ?

MISS BOYDEN. You can't be a failure until you make a start. But you must excuse me. I've got work to do. Work, you know . . . doing things.

[The entrance door opens and MISS LENNART comes leisurely in. She is about twenty-five, tall and dark, and intensely aware of herself. She does not wear an overall, but is dressed tastefully and with a sense of the value of colour rare in offices. She carries the conventional handbag, however. She approaches the typist's table very much as a millionaire's yacht makes the jetty.]

MISS LENNART *[on her way across]*. Good morning.

MR WILLIS. Morning.

MISS BOYDEN. Good morning. Oh, Miss Lennart, Mr Harker's been asking for you.

MISS LENNART. So soon ? . . . How tiresome !

[She sits down.]

MISS BOYDEN. You're a bit late, you know.

MISS LENNART. Why must the poor man get into difficulties before the day is properly started?

MISS BOYDEN. I think he's got a lot of letters this morning.

MISS LENNART [*abstractedly*]. Letters. . . . Never write a letter, and never destroy one. [*She draws a finger down her table.*] This table is absolutely foul! The first letter this morning shall be to Mrs Hushett. How shall we begin? . . . "My dear Hushett. . . . We regret we do not share your indifference to grime—full stop. In all our three weeks' experience of this office—er——"

MISS BOYDEN. Mrs Hushett's been here for seven years.

MISS LENNART. A fair apprenticeship.

[MR HARKER in his room gives the bell on his desk two or three impatient bangs. MISS LENNART turns her head.

MISS LENNART. Hear the tinkling of the bells—Harker's bells! Ah, what dismal grammar their melody foretells! [*She gets up, taking a pad and pencil.*] Well, I suppose I must. I know I shan't be appreciated, but here goes.

[*She enters the private room.*

MISS BOYDEN. No. . . . I don't think she'll last long.

MR WILLS. Oh, I don't know. She strikes me as being rather a clever girl.

MISS BOYDEN. I suppose what you mean is that she's attractive, in a way. But she's just cheeky really. She's got rather a nerve to go on the way she does after only three weeks in the job.

[*The door on the right opens and MR COOMBES enters, carrying one or two cloth-pattern folders. He is young and astute and successful at his job. He goes up to the small table and takes the chair.*

MR COOMBES. Good morning, Miss Boyden. Morning, Willy. How's it going?

MR WILLS [*swinging round to talk*]. Hello, Freddie ! Sorry Miss Lennart's engaged.

MR COOMBES. Wrong this time, Willy. The fair Lennart must wait. I'm all business. An audience of Harker is what I'm after . . . these assortments. [*He indicates the patterns.*] You see, I want to get on. Efficiency's my ticket. [*He leans forward, chin on hand, and gazes fixedly at MR WILLS.*] Let me plan your career !

MR WILLS. Go and boil your head.

MR COOMBES. Ah, Willy, you lack ambition ! That's the worst of you Bolshies . . . you want to reduce us all to the lowest common denominator.

MR WILLS. I don't want to do anything of the sort, and neither does anyone else. What we want to do is to raise the standard of living of the workers.

MR COOMBES. Same thing. . . . By the way, I see two of your pals got run in yesterday.

MR WILLS. Who got run in—and what for ?

MR COOMBES. Somebody on that paper you read. . . . Some article about a judge. . . . Very serious. You mustn't go about saying things about judges. They're devilish touchy.

MR WILLS. I don't know anything about it. Less than you do about Soviet Russia. If you gave as much study to that as you do to racing-form—

MR COOMBES. That reminds me. . . . Would you like a flutter to-day ? . . . Fly-leaf in the three-fifteen at Newbury.

MR WILLS. I'm not interested.

MR COOMBES. It's *past the post*, Willy. Don't throw good money away. Tried a cert . . . a stone in hand.

MR WILLS. A bird in the hand for me.

[MISS LENNART comes from the private room. MR COOMBES jumps to his feet. MISS LENNART sits down and begins

*to look through a sheaf of papers she has brought out.
She gives MR COOMBES scant attention.*

MR COOMBES [*crossing over*]. Ah, good morning, Miss Lennart. How is it going?

MISS LENNART. I'm very busy, Mr Coombes.

MR COOMBES. But not too busy to talk to little Freddie. Tell me, why don't you wear an overall like the other girls in this office?

MISS LENNART. If the other girls dressed like this I should probably wear an overall.

MR COOMBES. That's the way to talk! D'ye hear that, Willy? No lowest common denominator for Miss Lennart.

MISS BOYDEN [*turning round*]. You can see Mr Harker now, Freddie. Run along; you're holding up the work.

MR COOMBES. What a boss you'd make, Jenny! I'll make a note of you. . . . Miss Lennart, you too have impressed me very favourably. . . . I have two tickets for the Ambassadors' to-night. . . . What do you say?

MISS LENNART. Mr Coombes, I look upon you with loathing. In a moment I shall ask Mr Wills to throw you out.

MR COOMBES. Well, if that isn't just too funny! . . . Like to have a go, Willy? . . . Now don't be cruel, Miss Lennart. What about these two tickets?

[MR HARKER *enters from his room.*

MR HARKER. Wills, I want a *pro forma* cost made out. Take a note. [MR WILLS *gets ready.*] 300 cases . . . 100 each . . . 19 yards 24 inches coloured bordered dhooties . . . as order 21903 . . . at one and a penny three-sixteenths per yard. . . . Cost, Insurance, and Freight—Calcutta. . . . Calculate the interest at ninety days. [He turns to go, and then remembers something.] And don't forget that twopence for cartage. You missed it last time and it had to come out of the cover. . . . We can't afford it.

MR COOMBES [*intercepting him*]. Can I see you a moment, sir ?

MR HARKER. What is it, Coombes ?

MR COOMBES. Those assortments, sir.

MR HARKER. All right. Give me a moment. I'll ring for you. [*He goes in.*]

MR WILLS. Confound him ! He can't forget that twopence.

MISS LENNART. It wasn't very much, was it ? Couldn't you have given it to him ?

MR COOMBES. It wasn't just one twopence, Miss Lennart, it was five hundred . . . and you didn't have it on you, did you, Willy . . . not in coppers !

MISS BOYDEN [*turning sharply*]. Clear out !

MR COOMBES. Can't . . . You heard old man Harker. . . . I'm waiting for the little bell. [*The bell rings.*] There we are. You'll have to excuse me. [*He goes in.*]

MR WILLS. He's a low brute.

MISS BOYDEN. You should have taken your cue from Miss Lennart and thrown him out.

MR WILLS. It's Harker I mean . . . whining about his twopence before everybody. I heard him out about it at the time.

MISS LENNART. He's in a very tiresome mood this morning. I could scarcely keep from throwing my book at his head. You know . . . you go in, and his back is towards you. There's something about his head . . . he holds it on one side . . . you want to throw something.

MR WILLS [*excitedly*]. By Jove, Miss Lennart, you're right ! That's what's wrong . . . it's his head ! I've puzzled over that and couldn't see it.

[MISS BOYDEN *pauses to listen.*]

MISS LENNART. Perhaps that's why small boys throw stones

at sparrows. They look so absurd . . . heads on one side.

MR WILLIS. You're right about Harker, anyhow. . . . I seem to have known it all the time.

[MISS BOYDEN *gathers some papers and moves down.*

MISS BOYDEN. In case I'm wanted, I'm going downstairs with these advice notes.

MISS LENNART [*rising and passing a hand wearily over her forehead*]. I think I'll accompany you. I want a couple of aspirins. Mr Coombes has upset me.

[*They go to the door.* MISS LENNART *passes out.* MISS BOYDEN *turns.*

MISS BOYDEN. When Coombes comes out, don't talk to him. Kick him . . . hard. [She goes out.

[MR WILLIS *sits thoughtfully staring out of the window.*

MR COOMBES *enters from the private room. He crosses silently and pauses at the door of exit.*

MR COOMBES. I say, Willy. [No answer.] Willy !

MR WILLIS. Oh, you're there ! I didn't notice you come out.

MR COOMBES [*coming up to the table*]. Were you dreaming of the Communist State ? . . . You know, Willy, you've got the wrong angle of this Soviet business. You seem to think it would be the dawn for you, and the end of me because I don't accept your views. . . . Not a bit. I don't think I'd mind if it did happen. You see, I can take what comes and be useful. That's why old Harker's sending me to Manchester next week ; I can get orders placed . . . make money. . . . But I wonder what the local Soviet would do with you. . . . I suppose you think it would be a case of you and—Mrs Hushett as joint bosses here and old Harker swinging on the first lamp-post. Don't be misled. . . . There's lots of nasty places to be swept out in a big city.

[*He comes down to the door.*] They'd probably hang you on the end of a brush and use you for that. . . . Think it over.

[*He goes out.*]

[MR WILLS, *chin in hand, gazes dejectedly out of the window. He sinks deep in thought. For a moment nothing happens, and then begins a subtle change. The light has been the uniform grey of a drab morning. But MR WILLS is thinking of what might be. Slowly a ruddy glow dawns about him.*]

MR WILLS. It's a confounded lie ! . . . It would be the dawn of a new life.

[*The red light passes into a glow of rose and amber, warming every corner of the room, wrapping him about. The outside world fades and disappears. Inside everything is bright. MR WILLS faces front. He is transfigured.*]

MR WILLS. Mrs Hushett and me ! Why not ?

[*He laughs softly and comes down stage.*]

MR WILLS [*softly, contemplatively*]. Mrs Hushett !

[*The outer door opens and MRS HUSHETT appears, silently but quickly. She wears a coat and hat.*]

MRS HUSHETT. You sent for me, Mr Wills.

MR WILLS [*at his full height and with a strange new vigour*]. Mrs Hushett, the hour has struck ! The old order is over. I have a telegram here from the District Commissar. [*The telegram is invisible, but MRS HUSHETT doesn't seem to mind.*] You and I are in charge until some definite arrangement can be made.

MRS HUSHETT. Oh, Mr Wills !

MR WILLS. You mustn't call me Mr Wills any more in that tone, Mrs Hushett. Just call me Comrade.

MRS HUSHETT. All right . . . comrade.

MR WILLS [*pacing up and down*]. And now we must institute a Soviet to run this business . . . you sit over there [*points*

to the chair on the right] and I will take this one [on the left]. Now, we are joint presidents. Let's see . . . whom have we ? . . . Miss Lennart, first of all.

[MISS LENNART enters and runs up to MR WILLS.

MISS LENNART. Oh, Tom, I'm so glad to hear of your appointment. I always believed in you. You're a hero now . . . public figure. How I admire you !

MR WILLS. Thank you, comrade. I shall have quite a lot to say to you presently. . . . Meantime we are holding 'a Soviet ; will you please take that seat ? [He indicates the typing-chair and she sits down in a rapt attitude.] First of all . . . we must deal with the man Harker.

[MR HARKER surprisingly enters from the right. He is dressed as he was on his first appearance. He comes up between MRS HUSHETT and MR WILLS, whom he faces.

MR HARKER. Oh, Mr Wills ! . . . can you please tell me what's to happen to me now ?

MR WILLS [sharply]. Take off your hat. [MR HARKER complies.] Harker, you are in a very grave position.

MR HARKER. I know it, sir.

MR WILLS. Don't call me sir. . . . I don't know whether we ought to let you remain here. The Commissar will have to decide that ultimately ; but in the meantime we might give you some sort of an odd job.

MR HARKER. Oh, I'd be glad to do anything.

MR WILLS [with a general glance round]. I may say that there will be a flat rate of wages until further notice. It will mean advances for some and [with a look at MR HARKER] reductions for others. Everyone will receive five pounds per week.

[Sensation.

MRS HUSHETT. Five pounds a week !

MR WILLS. It isn't much, I know, Comrade Hushett, but you at any rate are sure of an advance in due course. . . .

But to return to you, Harker. You'd better make a start by keeping the place tidy. . . . There's too much grime about.

MRS HUSHETT. I'll get my brush. It's in the basement.

MR WILLIS [*with a commanding gesture*]. No, you won't. Harker'll get it . . . and Harker'll use it. Get along now . . . make it snappy ! . . . And when you've done that, you can put out fresh blotting-paper and new ink. This stuff is abominable . . . and the Commissar might drop in. We must be efficient.

[MR WILLIS *grabs the large sheet of blotting-paper off his desk and crumples it into a ball. Then he turns to*

MR HARKER.

MR WILLIS. Hurry up, before I change my mind and turn you out.

[MR HARKER *makes to go. As he turns, MR WILLIS throws the blotting-paper and registers a direct hit.*

MR WILLIS. There ! . . . I've wanted to do that for months. . . . And now, comrades, I think that will do for the present. Mrs Hushett, you can have the rest of the day off. Comrade Lennart and I have some matters to discuss. Report to-morrow at ten sharp.

[MRS HUSHETT *moves silently to the door and goes out, MR WILLIS crossing over and opening door for her. He closes the door, and standing with his back to it regards MISS LENNART, who is smiling wonderfully upon him. Presently he swaggers across.*

MISS LENNART. You were marvellous !

MR WILLIS. Miss Lennart . . . Miss 'A. Lennart, isn't it ?

MISS LENNART. Yes.

MR WILLIS. Tell me . . . is it Astra ?

MISS LENNART. Why, yes. How did you know ?

MR WILLIS. I just . . . knew. How beautiful ! Astra Lennart.

MISS LENNART. I'm so glad you like it.

MR WILLS. Listen, Astra, I have two tickets for the Ambassadors' to-night. Will you join me?

MISS LENNART. Oh, Tom! How good of you . . . in your hour of triumph.

MR WILLS. I hope to have such an hour again.

MISS LENNART. Who knows. . . .

MR WILLS. Come, we must celebrate. Put on your coat and hat. We'll go out and breathe fresh air.

MISS LENNART [*springing up*]. Splendid! Just give me a moment.

[Before MR WILLS knows it she has kissed him lightly on the cheek and run to the door, where she turns.]

MISS LENNART. I won't keep you waiting long, dear.

[She disappears.]

[MR WILLS stands for a moment in Paradise; then slowly moves up and sits at his desk. He rests his chin on his hand and gazes out of the window. Presently the beautiful colours begin to fade. The outside world assumes form once more. The ruddy glow continues, however, to bathe his head and shoulders.]

[The entrance door opens to admit MISS BOYDEN, who comes forward a little, speaking.]

MISS BOYDEN. I say, Tom, did you examine Smithson's last delivery? *[There is no reply, and she stands still. Then a little louder]* Tom!

[Still no reply. MISS BOYDEN heaves a sigh of despair. Her eye catches the ball of blotting-paper on the floor. Picking it up, she makes to throw it hard at MR WILLS. Her hand pauses in mid-air and her head turns towards the private room. Down comes her hand slowly and she looks at the missile. Another glance at MR WILLS, and then she tiptoes silently across to MR HARKER'S door.]

Softly she turns the handle and opens the door, an inch at a time. Then, taking careful aim, she fires her shot hard and true. There is a submerged grunt from within. She closes the door swiftly, and, running silently across, goes out. There is a moment's pause. Then the inner door opens and MR HARKER appears. His rage is terrible—majestic in fact, for he carries the ball before him like the orb at a coronation. His eye lights on MR WILLS, still gazing out of the window.

MR HARKER [*in an awful voice*]. Wills !

[The red light snaps off as MR WILLS almost falls from his chair.]

MR WILLS. Yes, sir . . . what is it, sir ?

MR HARKER. How dare you ? How dare you pretend you don't know ? Have you gone mad ?

[MR WILLS passes a hand over his brow.]

MR HARKER. How dare you strike me on the head with this ?

MR WILLS. I—I don't understand, sir. . . . What is it ?

MR HARKER. Don't bandy words with me, sir. It's a—a filthy piece of blotting-paper.

MR WILLS [*after a hasty glance at his desk where the blotting-paper used to lie*]. Good gracious !

MR HARKER. There can't possibly be any explanation of this outrage. You admit throwing it ?

MR WILLS. Really, sir, I don't understand.

MR HARKER. Do you have the effrontery to deny it ?

MR WILLS. Yes—er—no . . . that is . . . I threw it, but—

MR HARKER. That will do. You will leave immediately. I shall telephone the cashier to make arrangements

[MR HARKER turns on his heel and makes to re-enter his room. On the threshold he finds he still holds the offending ball and, with a gesture of disgust, tosses it

under the desk at the back. He then goes in and closes the door. MR WILLIS is standing, stunned.

[The other door opens to admit MISS BOYDEN and MISS LENNART. MISS LENNART crosses to her table and takes up her papers. MISS BOYDEN anxiously approaches MR WILLIS.]

MISS BOYDEN. What's the matter, Tom? . . . What happened?

MR WILLIS. I'm sacked . . . that's all I hit old Harker with a lump of blotting-paper.

MISS LENNART. What! You hit him? . . . Oh, good man!

MISS BOYDEN. Tom . . . you didn't . . . it's all a mistake. I'll go in and explain everything.

MR WILLIS. Stop!—there's no mistake. . . . I hit him. He's been asking for it for months. . . . I suppose I went mad. . . . But I'm glad I did it. I'd do it again!

MISS BOYDEN. Tom, you've got to listen—

MR WILLIS [*in a voice of command*]. Go and put on your coat and hat. We're leaving—together. I've found out something. . . . We're going into business.

MISS BOYDEN. Oh, Tom, do you mean it? [*She kisses him lightly on the cheek, and runs to the door.*] I won't keep you waiting long, dear. [*She goes out.*]

[MR WILLIS seems to hear an echo and he turns, rather fuddled, in MISS LENNART's direction. Then he goes to the desk and collects his case.]

MR WILLIS [*moving slowly over to the door*]. Well, I'm off. . . . I'm just going downstairs for a word with young Coombes. [*He hesitates, trying to remember something, and turns to MISS LENNART.*] I say . . . I want to ask you something.

MISS LENNART. Yes?

MR WILLS. Tell me . . . is your name Astra ?

MISS LENNART. No—it's Alice.

MR WILLS. H'm . . . ah, well . . . it doesn't matter. Good-bye.

[MR WILLS *goes out*. MISS LENNART *leans forward and gazes after him, puzzled*. The bell rings in the private room.

[MISS LENNART *rises and takes up her book*.

MISS LENNART [*moving up towards the door*]. Oh, dear !

CURTAIN

THE SHIRT

ADAPTATION OF RADIO PLAY

on an Old Folk Tale

by

Francis Dillon

CHARACTERS

STORY-TELLER. *He may wear a fantastic costume, such as an astrologer's, for instance, or appear before the curtains in evening dress in the manner of a compère. Voice and manner bland, easy, and intimate.*

THE QUEEN. *Clear, strong, and unaffected. Very direct and commanding. Simple costume; always wears her crown.*

CHANCELLOR. *About 60. Rather pompous, but drops into oily insinuation. Carries a black-and-white rod. Keeps his chin in the air.*

KING. *Black hose, slashed black-and-dull-red doublet. Crown hung with black crêpe. A deep voice—very flatly produced. Able to laugh convincingly.*

COMMENTATOR. *Very much the B.B.C. commentator in pace, pitch, and diction. The scene in which he appears depends entirely on his catching the manner of and at the same time slightly caricaturing the stock commentator. (The part was first played by Naunton Wayne.) Costume: Sports coat and particoloured hose.*

BUCKRAM. *Fruity and commonplace. Aggressive. Loud check doublet and hose.*

BEGGAR. *Young, rather fat, self-satisfied, and slow moving. Dressed in rags, but not picturesquely.*

OTHER CHARACTERS

in order of appearance

YOUNG NOBLE. *Lean and languid. Speaks with a slight lisp.*

COURT PHYSICIAN. *Moustache. Hearty red face and pompous manner. Carries a black bag and saw.*

2ND COURT PHYSICIAN. *Wears glasses and goatee beard. Lecturing manner. Large book under his arm.*

BUCKRAM'S PHYSICIAN. *Stumbling old German with full beard. Mumbles a good deal. Wears gown and Homburg.*

KING'S JESTER. *Lancashire. Usual jester garb but in black. Coughs a good deal.*

ROYAL HUNT-MASTER. *Bawls in county voice. Modern M.F.H. costume. Very bow-legged.*

POET. *Extremely affected. Pale blue costume. Carries a flower.*

LORD WALRUS. *Blinp with walrus moustache and any military fantasy the wardrobe can afford.*

CRICK BUSBY. *Grooner. Troubadour costume, or any music-hall crooner's suit.*

HUFFY and DUFFY. *Just two black-faced cross-talkers. Coon dress.*

SWING SWATTERS. *Anybody with an instrument, whether they play it or not. They should be drilled to the usual meaningless business of lifting instruments, standing up together, and so on. Any uniform dress at all from period to present.*

TENOR. *The particular affectation to aim at is the long drawn-out howl with eyes closed and very "sung" vowels. An old ballad should be chosen "Trees" is admirable. Modern dress.*

S. S. SIDNEY. *Cockney comedian. A raucous, red-nosed fellow. Funny clothes and hat.*

MERCHANTS 1, 2, 3, 4. *Should all be dressed alike—soberly.*

VOICES. *Voice and face only. Variety the main consideration.*

COSTUMES : Same as suggested, but the greatest liberty can be allowed the designer. Nothing "period" will come amiss so long as it indicates the character. In general, members of the nobility are beribboned and beplumed and prefer to wear their coronets.

SCENES

I : The Great Hall with chairs and thrones.

II : The same with chairs removed.

III : The same with chairs and thrones removed.

A flat desk added.

IV : A street drop.

V : The Great Hall with thrones.

Alternatively Scene I can be played without benches and chairs.

Scene IV can be played before the curtains if sufficient apron is left.

FRANCIS DILLON is the well-known B.B.C. Producer.

After spending some time in Russia at the end of the last war, he "drifted casually" to India, where, amongst other things, he ran an experimental theatre. Although trained as a musician, it was his love of the drama and gift as a script-writer that finally brought him to Broadcasting House, where, to use his own words, he does "a wild variety of productions."

One week, for instance, finds him putting Dekker's *Shoemakers' Holiday* on the air, and the next *The Red Army*, or *Japan Wants the Earth*, only to be followed by the fortnightly feature *Country Magazine*.

Being Irish, he has a particular liking for the fairy-story and has written and produced a number of radio plays based on such stories, including *The Nightingale*, *Twelve by the Mail*, and *The Golden Cockerel*.

This stage adaptation of his radio play *The Shirt* was made specially for this collection.

THE SHIRT¹

Music is heard and the STORY-TELLER appears before the curtain.

The music dies away.

STORY-TELLER. Long, long ago, so long ago that many of our newest ideas were already forgotten, there lived an exceedingly rich and powerful King. His subjects were loyal, and there was every facility in his kingdom for his favourite amusements, [*rall.*] but towards the end of the fifth year of his reign he fell into a deep melancholy. The most desperate efforts of the Court brought not the faintest flicker of interest to his Majesty's eye, and at last the Queen bade the Chancellor summon to the Great Hall of Audience all the notables of the kingdom, nobles, councillors, magicians, and even certain commoners.

SCENE I

The light fades. The STORY-TELLER disappears. A babble is heard as the curtain rises on the Great Hall of Audience. There is a door L., a door R., and an archway L. C. back. Two chairs on a dais R. C. back. L. rows of chairs with nobles seated. R. rows of commoners standing. A fanfare sounds. The nobles rise to their feet. The commoners fall on their knees, foreheads to floor. Enter the QUEEN through archway attended by CHANCELLOR and Captain of the Guard.

QUEEN. Be seated, nobles. Commoners, you may rise from your knees. You may proceed, my Lord Chancellor.

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to the author, Francis Dillon, Esq., Broadcasting House, London, W.1.

YOUNG NOBLE. Your Majesty, I claim my right to speak in the Hall of Audience before the Chancellor, who is of less noble birth.

QUEEN. I am, as you know, but lately come to this kingdom, your Grace, and you must instruct me if I seem to override your precedents. You may speak.

YOUNG NOBLE. Oh. I have nothing to say, your Majesty, except to insist on my ancient privilege.

[Commoners mumble.]

QUEEN. Proceed, Chancellor.

CHANCELLOR. Your Majesty, the whole kingdom shares your sorrow for the terrible malady which has overtaken our beloved King. I have obeyed your royal command and summoned to audience these—er—various lieges and subjects, and, while it would seem insolence in me to question your choice of counsellors, I cannot conceive that any useful suggestion whatsoever is likely to emanate from the majority of those here assembled. *[He stares at the commoners.]*

QUEEN. I come from a plain, practical country, Chancellor, where we are disposed to try strange remedies when familiar ones fail.

CHANCELLOR. Then will your Majesty be pleased to address these—er—new-found counsellors?

[Another stare at commoners.]

QUEEN. You know that I can only approach the King when the King desires to see me, and it is with no pleasure at all that I have to ask *you* to give me, and these subjects, a report of his Majesty's present condition, and—if I am not overriding another ancient precedent—I would suggest that you begin at the beginning.

CHANCELLOR. But, your Majesty, all the Court is acquainted with the King's . . .

QUEEN. I am sure they are, Chancellor, but you have

already made it clear that we have others here not of the Court.

CHANCELLOR. Some few, your Majesty, but do they greatly matter ?

QUEEN. That we shall see. [*Unfolds a scroll.*] Instruct the Court Physician to speak.

CHANCELLOR. Page, inform the Griffin King of Arms that her Majesty commands the appropriate herald to sound for the Court Physician.

QUEEN. The Court Physician is on your immediate right, Chancellor.

CHANCELLOR. But the traditional forms and usages . . .

QUEEN. . . are abrogated for this Council. A State of Urgency and Alarm is proclaimed.

CHANCELLOR. Then the heralds must . . .

QUEEN. . . remain exactly where they are. I constitute this a private council which I shall myself conduct. You see I have learnt something of your customs and usages.

CHANCELLOR. But your Majesty cannot hold a *private* council with commoners present.

QUEEN. Then I will have them ennobled, if you insist.

CHANCELLOR. Oh no. There is—er—a precedent for their attendance.

QUEEN. Very well. Now, Court Physician, let us have your report with as little preamble as possible.

COURT PHYSICIAN. Man has four humours, your Majesty, which flow through his soul. In the King's case, the melancholic humour has obtained complete dominance. I prognosticate a strengthening of that melancholic humour unless the contrary or sanguine humour can be stimulated.

QUEEN. And what was your prescription ?

COURT PHYSICIAN. The emotions encourage the sanguine humour, and laughter drives the melancholy humour from

the soul. I prescribed, therefore, emotion and laughter, particularly laughter.

QUEEN. Is there any other school of physic ?

COURT PHYSICIAN. Not in the Court, your Majesty.

QUEEN. I sent for others. [*Consults scroll—turns to commoners.*] What have you to say of the prescription ?

[COURT PHYSICIAN *puts his hands to his ears.*

2ND PHYSICIAN [*a commoner*]. Your Majesty, laughter is a response within unco-ordinated love instincts. It marks the escape of psycho-physical energy gathered to meet an obstruction.

[*Smacks lips with satisfaction—glares at COURT PHYSICIAN.*

QUEEN. Do you or do you not agree with the Court Physician ?

2ND PHYSICIAN [*spreading his arms—clutching his book*]. An examination of past stimuli is required.

QUEEN. We shall come to that. Do you agree ?

2ND PHYSICIAN [*with great hesitation*]. In a sense, yes.

QUEEN. Good. Perhaps, Chancellor, you will now bring this miserable history up to date by telling us what has been done, and who has done it.

CHANCELLOR. The King's Jester !

JESTER [*moving from the foot of the dais ; stands dejected ; gives a terrible cough*]. Ther's bin nobbut seven joakes in eawr family these fower hundert years, and they allus brought th'ouse down. Fer's Ah'm concerned, end o't'world's coom.

CHANCELLOR. I myself have laughed at one of the Jester's practical jokes for thirty years, and since no one at Court may even smile until the King is cured, life has become very hard.

BUCKRAM. You need a few new wisecracks in this Court.

CHANCELLOR. Who gave you permission to speak ? You, a commoner. Your Majesty, you see what happens when . . .

QUEEN. Who is that ?

CHANCELLOR. Who are you, fellow, and what are you doing here ?

BUCKRAM. Master Buckram, please your Majesty, and I came on your own summons served by twenty-five soldiers. And not so much of the "fellow," Chancellor—I am not without some following.

QUEEN. Oh yes—Master Buckram—Purveyor of the People's Amusements. We shall come to you later. Meanwhile, do not take me too literally when I say that the formal Court procedure is in abeyance for this Council. Give me the list, Chancellor. Mmm . . . Master of the Royal Hunt.

HERALD [*off*]. Master of the Royal Hunt !

[*A horn is heard—followed by galloping hooves—off.*]

QUEEN [*startled*]. What does this mean ? [*Horse neighs off.*]

CHANCELLOR. Your Majesty, it is the ancient privilege of the Royal Hunt-master to appear at Council on horseback.

QUEEN. Is it ? Unhorse him.

HERALD [*off*]. Dismount, sir.

[*Enter M.R.H.—very bow-legged.*]

QUEEN. Well, what have you done to cure the King ?

M.R.H. Your Majesty, the King will not hunt. Meanwhile, the land is overrun with wild beasts, to the terror of the King's subjects.

QUEEN. Why are the wild beasts not shot or trapped ?

[*Sensation amongst nobles.*]

M.R.H. Shot !—Trapped !—By Gad, the penalty for that is death.

QUEEN. The—oh ! I haven't the time to have that explained to me. You may leave us.

M.R.H. Your servant, your Majesty.

[*Exit M.R.H. Horse neighs and gallops away—off.*]

QUEEN [*consulting scroll*]. Royal Music Master, Keeper of

the Dancers, Purveyor of Private Amusements, you have failed to amuse or even interest your King. Have you any further suggestions?

SEVERAL. No, your Majesty.

QUEEN. Royal Poet, you were once the King's favourite. What have you done?

POET [*with gestures, and beautiful but very, very affected diction*]. In the hills beyond the sapphire mines lies a great forest where the light is pale and clear like deep clean water, and there are no paths. In the very heart of the forest is a wide lake with shallow shores and soft green banks, and there my King and I would hunt.

QUEEN. And can you not tempt him there now?

POET. If the King entered that forest with his mind clouded and troubled he would be gored to death. He would not be the hunter but the hunted.

QUEEN. What savage beasts do you hunt there?

POET. No savage beasts, your Majesty. We hunt the unicorn.

BUCKRAM. The unicorn! There is no such animal. I have offered fifty thousand gold dinars for a unicorn, dead or alive.

POET. Master Buckram, there are no dead unicorns.

BUCKRAM. Rubbish.

POET. And a live unicorn cannot be captured, Master Buckram.

BUCKRAM. Nonsense. A chain of gold will capture anything. If the chain is long enough.

POET. Poor Buckram; the People's Purveyor. Poor people!

BUCKRAM. Poor Buckram! Why, you highbrow fake, you couldn't draw three people to a free show.

QUEEN. Enough. This leads us nowhere. Has any mem-

ber of the Court a further suggestion to make? Lord Walrus, have you?

LORD WALRUS. Damme, Madam, I am the Leader of the Army. I'm not expected to stand on my head and whistle through my toes. What we want is a good war.

CHANCELLOR. That has already been suggested—his Majesty was not amused. What pleases himself, every man knows. Mostly they are the things which have failed to please the King. What we need now is a new magician of some sort.

QUEEN. And so we come to the commoners. Master Buckram!

BUCKRAM [*stepping full centre*]. All these so-called amusements of the Court are out of date. The King is moving with the times; what he wants is real entertainment—novelty.

QUEEN. Well?

BUCKRAM. I know the country where they have new jesters and minstrels. Give me a free hand to bring them in and you'll see his Majesty sit up and take notice in less than five minutes.

QUEEN. You shall have permits, Master Buckram.

CHANCELLOR. Your Majesty, may I suggest that you impose some little penalty in the very likely event of this fellow's failure to amuse the King. His ears could be cropped, say, and his tongue removed, and his goods confiscated. That would be sufficient, I think.

QUEEN. Yes, I think that would meet the case.

BUCKRAM [*trying to slide back among commoners*]. I refuse to . . . to . . .

QUEEN. Then you are now liable to the penalties, Master Buckram.

BUCKRAM [*forward again*]. Then I insist on bringing over some new physicians as well.

QUEEN. You may bring one.

BUCKRAM. And I want an hour . . .

QUEEN. We shall agree on details, Master Buckram. I dismiss this Council.

[The curtain falls—music begins and dies as the STORY-TELLER appears before the curtain.]

STORY-TELLER. And one evening in early summer the whole Court assembled to hear Master Buckram's wonderful entertainment. Expert watchers gathered round the King to observe the slightest change in the settled melancholy of the royal visage. In accordance with the new routine procedure, the Great Hall was bare and all the courtiers were silent and still. Not the faintest mark of approval was to be shown to the entertainers until the King himself made some sign. At a fractional deepening of his Majesty's melancholy a gong was to be struck and the entertainer removed.

SCENE II

SCENE : *The same, the KING and QUEEN enthroned. Guards stand between the thrones and the archway L. through which the performers make their entrances. A Trained Observer R. watches the KING's face, notebook in hand. BUCKRAM and the CHANCELLOR are downstage L. The gonged performers may be removed by door L. to keep up pace of the scene.*

CHANCELLOR *[whisper]*. Now, Master Buckram. *[With great meaning]* I sincerely hope you do not fail.

BUCKRAM *[steps forward—announces]*. First we present Crik Busby. In his own country hundreds of thousands of people live only for the sound of his golden voice.

[Enter BUSBY—bows and smiles to everyone—very confident—croons in usual maudlin manner nearly one verse of latest song before a gong sounds.]

KING. Executioner !

EXECUTIONER [*very deep bass*]. Your Majesty.

KING. Have that moaning person strangled.

[*Guards seize crooner.*]

CHANCELLOR [*whisper*]. Your Majesty, he is a subject of a friendly state.

KING. Oh ! then declare war on that state.

CHANCELLOR [*whisper*]. It is not politic at present, but if your Majesty would be interested . . .

KING. Oh ! never mind. Take him away.

[*He is taken away ; the guards return.*]

CHANCELLOR. Will your Majesty hear the others ?

KING. I have no wish either way.

BUCKRAM [*leaping in*]. Now we present Huffy and Duffy, quick-fire comedians.

[*Enter DUFFY and then HUFFY—black-faced comedians.*]

HUFFY [*deep*]. Good evenin', Suh. Why, ef et ain't old Duffy. Where you bin this long time ?

DUFFY [*light*]. Ain't bin nowhere. Just married.

HUFFY. *Thase* bad.

DUFFY. Not *so* bad. I got mighty fine house.

HUFFY. *Thase* good.

DUFFY. Not *so* good. That house got burned down.

HUFFY. *Thase* bad.

DUFFY. Not *so* bad. Wife got burned down too.

HUFFY. *Thase* good.

DUFFY. Yeh. *Thase* good. What you got in this yere café ?

HUFFY. Ah got everythin'.

DUFFY. Bring me some tea widout sugar.

HUFFY. Ain't got no sugar.

DUFFY. All right, I'll take cawfee.

HUFFY. Right here, suh.

DUFFY. Hey ! mind my head.

HUFFY. Why? where you goin'?

[Gong. Guards seize them]

KING. Are those subjects of a friendly state?

CHANCELLOR. Of the same state, your Majesty.

KING. How old are those jests?

CHANCELLOR. No one can say, your Majesty. Similar jests are found in the oldest prehistoric rock.

KING [sighs]. Take them away.

[They are led away by the guards.]

BUCKRAM. And now for Bill Poffles and his world-famous Swing Swatters, a revelation in rhythm and melody.

[Enter five SWING SWATTERS, playing; before long, a gong; the guards surround them.]

[The KING groans.]

[The Trained Observer motions the SWING SWATTERS away and the guards remove them.]

* BUCKRAM [furious whisper]. That gongster isn't giving the boys a chance.

CHANCELLOR [whisper]. You might just save one of your ears if you have some pleasant music, some guitarists, a fine voice, in the old manner, you know.

BUCKRAM [whisper]. I don't deal in highbrow stuff. Wait a minute. [Announcing] The Wonder Tenor of the West in one of our own most lovely songs.

[Enter a beautiful TENOR singing as he comes a sentimental ballad—we suggest "Trees" very slow; almost at once—several gongs.]

[The KING gives longer and deeper groans.]

[The TENOR is removed.]

BUCKRAM [desperate]. Side-splitting Sidney, clean as a whistle.

[Enter SIDE-SPLITTING SIDNEY whistling bird-song—few bars only.]

SIDE-SPLITTING SIDNEY. But I see you folks haven't much use for a nice bird. [*Suddenly raising voice to loud bellow*] I was goin' down the street the other day, and I met a man ; I could tell he was a man, he had a ring in his nose ; and he said to me, "Where you goin' ?" I said, "Where am I going ?" "Yes," he said, "where are you goin' ?" . . .

[*Gong.*]

[*The KING groans and breaks into sobs.*]

[*Guards seize SIDE-SPLITTING SIDNEY and fling him out.*]

CHANCELLOR. Guards ! Seize Master Buckram, too.

BUCKRAM. The Queen's promise ! My physician ! His Majesty has not been properly diagnosed. His Majesty must see my physician.

KING. Oh ! Oh ! very well.

CHANCELLOR. Would it not be better to let the Executioner . . .

BUCKRAM. Your Majesty, here he is. He has cured thousands of your disease.

[*Enter BUCKRAM'S PHYSICIAN.*]

BUCKRAM'S PHYSICIAN. I shall be so honoured to cure your Majesty.

CHANCELLOR [*muttering*]. If you can.

BUCKRAM'S PHYSICIAN. You are the Chancellor, huh ? Und suffering from strong power complex. Und also sado-masochist type, huh ? I can also cure you, Chancellor.

CHANCELLOR. Fellow, attend his Majesty.

BUCKRAM'S PHYSICIAN. His is an eggstreimc but familiar case of a psyche . . .

KING. What . . .

CHANCELLOR. Psyche is a goddess we have discarded, your Majesty. The entertainers dress up old jests ; this physician resurrects old gods.

BUCKRAM'S PHYSICIAN. There are no old gods to me, my

friendt. I tell you he has a regressed psyche. He fears death and old age.

CHANCELLOR. Guards ! . . .

KING. Who does not ? I have heard enough talk. You have one minute to declare your cure.

BUCKRAM'S PHYSICIAN. But I moost know your dreams, your child-life, and your parents. I moost . . .

CHANCELLOR. One minute, his Majesty said.

BUCKRAM'S PHYSICIAN. So. You want magic, huh ?

CHANCELLOR. You have forty-five seconds.

BUCKRAM'S PHYSICIAN [*mutters rapid German*]. Ah ! key down the back. No, that is for warts. [*Mutters*] Counting sheep. No, that is for foot-and-mouth.

CHANCELLOR. Fifteen seconds.

BUCKRAM'S PHYSICIAN. I have her.

CHANCELLOR. Yes ?

BUCKRAM'S PHYSICIAN. So ! His Majesty will be cured by wearing for seven days der shirt of a completely happy man.

SEVERAL [*sensation*]. The shirt of a happy man ?

KING. All in this country are happy except the King.

CHANCELLOR. We will find the happiest, your Majesty.

KING. Do not disturb me again until he is found.

CHANCELLOR. The shirt of a happy man.

[*The lights fade.*]

SCENE III

The Great Hall of Audience, but the thrones are masked or removed. The CHANCELLOR is seated at an ornate flat desk R. covered with scrolls of paper, profile to auditorium. A secretary faces audience across length of table. A halberdier guards door R.

CHANCELLOR [*taking up scroll*]. And who compiled this list ?

SECRETARY. The Chief of Police, sir. They are people he

has long had under observation, suspected of being unduly contented.

CHANCELLOR. I suspect you of undue zeal. We shall have no use for these lists. Burn them. The Select Committee will find the happy man. And this list [*business*] I suspect is a complete catalogue of your relations.

[*Door L. opens.*

MAID [*enters and stands bowing, top stage from door*]. Her Majesty the Queen.

[*The QUEEN sweeps in.*

CHANCELLOR [*rising*]. Your Majesty's most devoted and humble . . .

QUEEN. Quite. Have you yet selected the happiest man?

CHANCELLOR. We are anxious, of course, to give the honour to a member of the Court.

QUEEN. Yourself, Chancellor?

CHANCELLOR. Alas, your Majesty, the cares of state weigh so heavily on me.

QUEEN. Quite. Well, what has been done so far?

CHANCELLOR. If you will be pleased to listen to the members of the Select Committee.

QUEEN. I suppose if I hadn't taken some part in this matter you would still be wrangling over precedents.

CHANCELLOR. Everything is now proceeding with the utmost dispatch. I am myself surprised at the progress made, although I regret your royal passion for—er—let me see now—er . . .

QUEEN. Getting a move on is what I said. And what exactly has been done?

CHANCELLOR. You will see, your Majesty. [*Indicating door L.*] We have succeeded in forming a representative Select Committee charged with finding the happiest man in the kingdom. I am expecting a report to-day.

QUEEN. Good. And how many have been examined ?

CHANCELLOR. I cannot give the exact figures, but I will summon the President. Guard !

GUARD. Sir.

[As he speaks the door R. flies open. A crowd of nobles enter fighting with much clatter and shouting, sweeping aside the guard ; the leaders suddenly see the QUEEN ; they stand confused, but salute with swords ; men continue to enter fighting.]

CHANCELLOR. My lords, put up your swords, the Queen is present.

QUEEN. Is fighting not forbidden within the Palace ?

CHANCELLOR. It is, but——

QUEEN. Are these gentlemen the members of the Select Committee ?

CHANCELLOR. Yes, your Majesty.

QUEEN. Perhaps the President will tell me what progress has been made. How many happy men have you examined ?

PRESIDENT *[a venerable beard, but sticking-plaster on face, as have many others of the Committee]*. None as yet, your Majesty.

QUEEN. Why not ?

PRESIDENT. We were arriving at a definition of the word "happy."

QUEEN. I see. And precisely at what stage are you now ?

PRESIDENT. At present we have forty-three differing definitions—I am sorry—forty-two. My Lord Unat has since died of his wounds.

QUEEN. And having arrived at your definition, where do you expect to find your happy man ?

PRESIDENT. Oh ! at Court, of course.

QUEEN. It seems to me the least likely place.

PRESIDENT. But where else could a man be happy ?

QUEEN. Well, my lords, leave us—pursue your search according to your ancient rites and usages.

[*Exit Select Committee R., bowing and backing out ; the QUEEN watches them.*]

QUEEN. Now, Chancellor, [*sits at desk*] let me see the lists.

CHANCELLOR. Your Majesty. There are, of course, many claimants. We have already sent first for those who do not wish to be examined. My secretary—

QUEEN [*scanning list*]. We will commence with the great merchant princes.

CHANCELLOR. Herald !

QUEEN. Never mind the herald. [*To secretary*] You !

CHANCELLOR [*flustered*]. At once.

[*Exit secretary.*]

QUEEN [*scanning list*]. One million. . . Two and a half million . . . hmmm. They have every reason to be happy. Guard !

GUARD. Your Majesty.

QUEEN. Take post there.

[*Points to archway, which still depends on stage for its light ; guard moves through and left, so that only his halberd can be seen.*]

QUEEN. Ah ! [*A fat man appears in archway.*] You look fat and contented enough. Are you happy ?

MERCHANT 1. I am not altogether miserable, your Majesty. I have received certain—er—substantial rewards for serving my country, but you must know that trading is a very anxious life. If you could only see your way to recommend an increase in the tax on foreign egg-whisks . . .

QUEEN. That will do. Take him away.

[*The guard's hand is seen pulling him L.*]

[*An exactly similar fat man appears. The stage lights*]

begin to dim and quiet music is heard. Only the head and shoulders of the witnesses are seen from now on in a bluish light—this dims a little as each disappears and comes up for the next.

QUEEN. You have seven country estates. Are you happy?

MERCHANT 2. I have, as you say, seven country estates, but Sir Rollo has nine, and, until trade improves, I see no prospect of acquiring . . .

[He is pulled L.]

MERCHANT 3. I have no child to succeed to my business and my lands, your Majesty. Had I a son . . .

[He is pulled L.]

MERCHANT 4. Indigestion, your Majesty. I suffer in the most appalling manner. . . .

[He is pulled L.]

QUEEN. Well, Chancellor, it seems that no very rich man is happy. At least he will not admit it. We will continue with our lists.

[Only the faces are seen in the archway as they speak and disappear.]

VOICE 1 *[high tenor]*. It is sinful to be happy.

VOICE 2 *[low and slow]*. I was happy once, for nine days in the valley of Panyo.

VOICE 3 *[quick-accented]*. To be happy is to be like a cow chewing placidly in the wet grass.

VOICE 4 *[nervous]*. Well, I—er—you sec,—for myself—er—I have nothing to grumble at, I suppose, but—er—my wife . . .

VOICE 5 *[rapidly]*. My daughters . . .

VOICE 6 *[deep-slow]*. My son . . .

VOICE 7 *[contrast 4]*. You don't know my wife. She takes good care I'm not happy.

VOICE 8 [*between closed teeth*]. Yes. I am happy. Happy to hate with every atom of my soul the very sound of the name of one man.

VOICE 9. If my wealth were just one quarter, no, one-third as much again . . .

VOICE 10. I lie awake in my bed, and at a thought the blood leaves my heart, and my veins are filled with fire which is instantly ice. My stomach cords and knots when I remember ten thousand possible dangers where I most love. While I stand here, something, something may shatter the peace I have built around her. Let me go.

VOICE 11 [*placidly*]. Well, I'm not exactly absolutely happy, you know, and I'm not unhappy. I'm just sort of—you know . . .

VOICE 12. No man can be both intelligent and happy in the world as it is to-day.

VOICE 13. What kind of man would be happy as I am, friendless . . .

[*The light fades completely.*

VOICE 14. . . . childless . . .

[CHORUS *moans.*

VOICE 15. . . . toothless . . .

[CHORUS *moans.*

VOICE 16. . . . landless . . .

[CHORUS *moans.*

VOICE 17. . . . hairless . . .

[CHORUS *moans.*

[*Lights come up as the moans die away.*

CHANCELLOR. Your Majesty, the two hundred and fifty-seventh list—even more assorted, as you commanded.

QUEEN. And most of them will claim to be happy.

CHANCELLOR. Until you ask questions.

QUEEN. And then envy, malice, hatred, and jealousy will

come creeping out, and we shall hear of hidden barbs of memory, and fear, and love distorted.

CHANCELLOR. Must you ask so many questions, your Majesty?

QUEEN. There must be a happy man somewhere in the kingdom. If there is one, then I shall find him . . . I hope. I shall not examine the petty traders; they are discontented by profession. Nor the peasants. If they were happy and contented, we should have no Merchant Princes to examine. Since the Capital is so uniformly discontented, we shall carry the search to other great towns and cities, and the country between.

CHANCELLOR. You will not expect me to leave the Court?

QUEEN. NO. You will remain here. I shall take with me the Poët, the Lieutenant of the Guard, and one or two other oddments, together with a small army.

[The curtain falls and the STORY-TELLER appears before it.]

STORY-TELLER. And so the Queen journeyed far out over the kingdom and nothing was heard of her for a long time. Meanwhile, the Select Committee continued its search for a definition of the word "happy," until only two opinions were left: those who thought happiness was a state of mind—they were known as the "Brains" party, and those who thought happiness a matter of health and fitness—known as "Brawns"; and as each of these opinions attracted equally powerful support, the Select Committee adjourned . . . to give each side time to prepare new arguments, such as bowmen, cavalry, pikemen, elephants, etc. . . . And, as those were honourable days, a pitched battle was fixed for the following Wednesday at three o'clock in the afternoon on the plain immediately outside the city gate called Charity. The city wall, you may be sure, was crowded with those unfortunate citizens who had not the privilege of bearing

arms. Those who could not get a place on the wall hired a trained observer to report the scene. . . .

[The babble of great crowds is heard. Voices call, "Five to four on Brawn," "I'll take even money on Brains."

Two Commentators appear before the curtain with a microphone. They look off stage R. The sound of the crowd dies slightly. Throughout the battle the sound of the crowd rises and falls. Battle sounds can be heard; occasionally a cock crows; a baby cries; birds twitter; but the crowd follows the fighting very closely.

FIRST COMMENTATOR *[sound effects may be added according to taste]*. Well, it's a wonderful sight. I wish you were all up here. There's a line of poplars just on the horizon looking very greenly transparent in the brilliant sunshine; there's a little dust just hanging over the battlefield, not enough to bother us, I don't think; and the mountains, the mountains are looking very blue and clear over the sort of rim of the sort of saucer-shaped battle—er—er—pitch. I can distinguish the banners of the knights who are on the Brains' side, led by Earl Horace, a Vache wavy-bendy; the Brains are, of course—but you all know which side is which . . . Hullo . . . something's happening. . . . No . . . it's all right; a fine black charger of the Brawns has probably recognized a stable companion on the other side, and he's off to join him. It's a lovely day. The bowmen are lying on the grass; they're all dressed in green, of course. *[Roar of cheers.]* What you've just heard is the crowd cheering a knight of the Brains who has caught the straying charger and very sportingly sent it back . . . These little acts of gallantry, of course, all go to make a grand show; the crowd love 'em, of course. . . . Hullo, now something's happening. They're getting ready; ladders are being placed against the horses, and the knights are climbing into the saddle; the bowmen have

stopped their practical jokes, and are gettin' into some sort of line . . . banners and pennants are being unfurled, and they really do make a magnificent show with all the bright colours and . . . er . . . things. Now both sides are drawn up, both using very simple line-formation, pikes in centre with pikes advanced, knights in full armour on each side, and bowmen on each flank. It's a lovely day, and I think we're goin' to have a *first-class show*. It reminds me of the day . . . hullo, the champion of each side is riding out.

[*Distant fanfare . . . crowd roar.*]

The heralds are sounding for the other side to yield. No one takes any notice of that, of course . . . the champions are only a few yards apart now . . . Brains' Champion—I can't distinguish his bearings from this angle—is using a good long battle-axe, made by Smith & Sons, and Brawns' Champion—bearings *two croissants rassis at main chief one rond de beurre or, point dexter*—he's swinging a very useful-looking spiked mace. They're off. Brain leads off with a very vicious half-cut, Brawn parries, and swings up, and just misses. Brawn backs away and now they're sparring for an opening, both looking very fit and keen. Brain looks the heavier man, about ten pounds, I should say, don't you think . . .

SECOND COMMENTATOR. Yes, about ten pounds.

FIRST COMMENTATOR. About ten pounds . . . now they've got nose to nose, Brawn giving short powerful swings which Brain manages to catch on his shield. He doesn't bother about countering. I imagine he's waiting for his man to tire . . . Oh ! beautiful. Nice work—he's down. [*Roar of crowd.*] Yes, Brain suddenly rode forward and turned with terrific suddenness, and caught Brawn a full crash across the hauberk ; lovely stroke and very pretty to watch. Brawn's on the ground, of course, and that's the signal for the fun to commence. Both sides are shooting now as fast as they

can go ; the knights are standing steady, of course, but some of the bowmen are down. Brawns' army looks as though it's going to charge ; they're moving forward, and Brains are retiring, yes, but they're retiring back to rising ground . . . that'll be an advantage later, of course . . . Nothing very much happening now. . . . Brains are leaving quite a lot of dead and wounded behind as they retire, and some of the wounded are crawling and staggering away from the field. It's a lovely day ; the sun is picking out white flames of steel, and a little wind is blowing, just sufficient to keep crests and banners waving. Now Brawns have halted, leathers are being tightened, and vizors snapped down ready for the charge. They've got a pretty stiff job on . . . up rising ground. Brains have got a lot of pikemen, left, moving out to receive the charge. It might come off, of course. Well, we shall know in a few minutes . . . here they . . . Hullo, what's this . . . something very odd . . . very odd indeed . . . both sides staring away up the old caravan track towards the mountains . . . I can't see . . . oh, yes, a large cloud of dust . . . looks like another army . . . this is very odd . . . dust is sort of drifting this way now . . . there's a herald in front of the dust, distaff *rampant* . . . why, it's the Queen's herald. Well, that looks like the finish. It's very disappointing, of course, but with the Queen on the field, the battle's off. It is the Queen. Knights on both sides are spurring out to meet her, and here's the Chancellor. It's a lovely sight, the sun is bringing out patches of colour, not on the Queen's army—they're white with dust—grey, I should say.

SECOND COMMENTATOR. Look out, here's the police !

[*Exeunt fast.*]

SCENE IV

Curtain rises on street drop. A crowd lines the back, cheering slightly, all except the BEGGAR, L. C., who sits cross-legged, singing.

Enter the QUEEN, attended, R.

Enter CHANCELLOR, attended, L. Halts, bows, just short of BEGGAR.

CHANCELLOR. Welcome, your Majesty. We hadn't expected you so soon. And—er—have you found a happy man?

QUEEN. No. Has your Select Committee found one?

CHANCELLOR. They were to have concluded the first stage of the enquiry this afternoon.

QUEEN. I have had enough of this peculiar country. I shall return to my own to-morrow. And tell the Captain of the Guard to keep the people back a little.

GUARD. Get back there.

CROWD. Hurrah!

GUARD. Get back, you.

[Offers to strike—BEGGAR ignores him.]

QUEEN. Just a moment. What is that man?

CHANCELLOR. A dirty beggar, your Majesty.

QUEEN. Bring him here.

CHANCELLOR. Captain, detail one of our men. . . .

QUEEN. Come here, you!

BEGGAR. Me?

QUEEN. Yes, you. Come here. Are you a rich beggar?

BEGGAR. I haven't a stiver, your Majesty.

QUEEN. Are you singing for gold?

BEGGAR. I'm singing because I like to sing. As for gold, I had a little once, and it made me miserable, so I threw it away.

QUEEN. And now you are happy.

BEGGAR. Perfectly, your Majesty.

QUEEN. And you want nothing?

BEGGAR. What I want is so little that it comes without even a wish.

QUEEN. I think you are probably an extremely stupid man.

BEGGAR. No one's thoughts or opinions distress me, your Majesty.

QUEEN. Have you friends, relations, a wife, children, any you love or hate?

BEGGAR. None, your Majesty.

QUEEN. You are, in fact, completely selfish.

BEGGAR. As your Majesty pleases.

QUEEN. Huh. Well, I'm going to take you to Court.

BEGGAR. I would rather return to my seat by the gate, your Majesty.

QUEEN. So . . . *you* . . . are . . . a . . . happy . . . man?

BEGGAR. Yes, your Majesty, I suppose I am.

QUEEN. Take him straight to the King.

CHANCELLOR. Herald. [*Pause.*] Herald.

[HERALD *rushes on.*

CHANCELLOR. Take this man to the Palace.

HERALD. Come here, fellow.

CHANCELLOR [*threatening*]. Herald. You will treat him with the utmost consideration, but let no one speak to him. He is the only happy man in the kingdom.

[*The crowd cheers.*

[*Quick curtain, and the STORY-TELLER appears immediately.*

STORY-TELLER. And so at last the Happy Man was found and there only remained the ceremony—for everything in this land had its ceremony—of investing the King with the Happy Man's shirt. Even the Select Committee attended and everyone was grave and silent, for no one dare laugh

until the King laughed, which he had not done for more than a year.

SCENE V

The curtain rises on the Great Hall of Audience in full assembly.

CHANCELLOR. Will your Majesty now receive the Happy Man?

KING. Oh ! very well.

[The CHANCELLOR signs to the HERALD who signs to the Guard at door, who turns and signs off. Enter the BEGGAR, very reluctantly.]

KING. So you are a happy man ?

BEGGAR. As happy as a man can be, your Majesty.

KING. And you are to cure my terrible melancholy.

BEGGAR. How can I do that, your Majesty ?

KING. Oh, it's very simple. I have to wear your shirt for seven days . . . ugh . . . You will be instructed in the proper ceremonies.

BEGGAR. But, your Majesty !

KING. Well ?

BEGGAR. You can't wear my shirt.

CHANCELLOR. Hold your tongue, man. Why not ?

BEGGAR. I—I have no shirt. *[Pulls back his jerkin.]*

KING. You . . . have . . . no . . . shirt . . . *[a rusty sort of croak]* . . . he has . . . *[croak a little nearer a laugh]* . . . no shirt . . . *[practically a laugh]* the only happy man and he . . . has . . . *[short laugh]*. *[Queen laughs.]* . . . he . . . has no shirt . . .

[Roaring with laughter, the whole Court joining.]

SLOW CURTAIN

MONKS AND A MUMMER

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

by

Madge Pemberton

CHARACTERS

EDMUND KEAN, *tragedian*

FATHER AMBROSE, *Master of the Guests*
at the Hospice of St Bernard

BROTHER CLEMENT

BROTHER MARTIN

BROTHER JOSEPH

In the year 1818, according to Molloy's *Life of Edmund Kean*, the actor went for his first trip abroad and stayed for a night at the Hospice of St Bernard where he related anecdotes to the monks concerning his past life and played and sang to them on an old spinet that was in the monastery. This was at the period of his life when he was beginning to weary of his London success.

MADGE PEMBERTON has had several of her plays presented on the London stage.

The King of Rome was produced at the Royalty Theatre, London ; *The Emperor of Make-believe*—a play about Hans Andersen—has had productions at the Embassy and Westminster theatres, London, and at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre ; *The Crimson Vulture* (written in collaboration with Malcolm Morley), a modern scientific thriller, was produced at Bournemouth and at Golder's Green, London ; while two of her one-act plays—*Papa Haydn* and *The Queen Waits*—have appeared in *The Best One-Act Plays* series (Harrap).

Her version, in English verse, of *The Great World Theatre*, a modern morality by the Austrian poet Hugo von Hoffmansthal, was produced in a Leeds church, and later in Peterborough Cathedral, by the boys of Oundle School.

The music for the songs sung by Kean can be obtained from Messrs J. B. Cramer & Co. Ltd., 139 New Bond Street, London, W.1. Robin-a-Thrush (Robin He married a Wife in the West), The Carter's Health (Of All the Horses in the Merry Greenwood), and Golden Vanity (Then the Boy swam round) are in English County Songs. How dear to Me the Hour when Daylight dies is sung to the air The Twisting of the Rope in Moore's Irish Melodies.

MONKS AND A MUMMER¹

SCENE I

The Guest Room in the Hospice of St Bernard in the year 1818 : a room barely furnished with a few wooden chairs and a table : window at back. Entrance up R. and another down L. A summer evening, not late.

Curtain rises to discover BROTHER CLEMENT seated L. C. at table reading a large book and BROTHER MARTIN standing by an old piano (or spinet) that stands against R. wall. BROTHER MARTIN is tightening the strings of the instrument while BROTHER CLEMENT reads aloud to himself.

BROTHER CLEMENT. "... In the lives of the Ancient Fathers is told a certain tale ... I will not say that others full as fair may not be heard, but I say that this is not to be so scorned but it is worth narrating. I will therefore tell you and relate what befell a certain minstrel ..."

[BROTHER MARTIN, *having mended a wire, now attacks the key-board with gusto, playing one note several times over as a piano-tuner does. BROTHER CLEMENT looks up in annoyance but decides to control himself and continues his reading.*

BROTHER CLEMENT. "... He wandered so far to and fro over so many a plot and place that he grew a-weary of the world and gave himself up to a Holy Order. Horses and robes and money and whatsoever he had he straight surrendered to it, and clean dismissed himself from the world, resolving never again to set feet in it."

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Curtis Brown Ltd., 6 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London, W.C.2.

[BROTHER MARTIN *now repeats his performance on the notes and* BROTHER CLEMENT *is driven to protest.*

BROTHER CLEMENT [*mildly*]. Must you do that, Brother Martin?

BROTHER MARTIN [*pausing*]. Must I do what?

BROTHER CLEMENT. Must you make that noise on that instrument?

BROTHER MARTIN. But I am tuning it. How can one tune a piano without testing the notes? Tell me that if you can, Brother Clement—

BROTHER CLEMENT [*testily*]. It is not my business to tell you, neither could I if it were. It is my business to read this legend.

BROTHER MARTIN. Then read. I do not wish to prevent you.

BROTHER CLEMENT. But you are preventing me. You know quite well reading does not easily come to me by nature. How am I to concentrate, with those sounds you are making to distract my attention?

BROTHER MARTIN. I will play more softly.

[*He just touches the notes faintly and* BROTHER CLEMENT *starts reading again.*

BROTHER CLEMENT. "... Wherefore he entered that Holy Order as folks say in Clairvaux; he whose life had all been spent in tumbling and leaping and dancing..."

[*But* BROTHER MARTIN's *enthusiasm gets the better of him once more and he starts again hammering out the notes.*

BROTHER CLEMENT [*leaping to his feet*]. It is no good. I cannot go on.

BROTHER MARTIN [*penitent*]. I am sorry. The notes—they excite me—

BROTHER CLEMENT. Why cannot you leave that thing alone? Nobody uses it.

BROTHER MARTIN. Alas—that is true. But there is somebody here who might use it to-night.

BROTHER CLEMENT. Somebody? Who?

BROTHER MARTIN. The new guest. I am going to ask him to play to us.

BROTHER CLEMENT. Why?

BROTHER MARTIN. Why? Because of the treat it would be. Directly I opened the door to him I said to myself "There is music in that face."—Do you not think I am right?

BROTHER CLEMENT. How should I know? I have not seen him yet.

BROTHER MARTIN. Of course. I forgot. He is being shown round the monastery by Father Ambrose. But presently he will come in here for his evening meal and then you will see him.

BROTHER CLEMENT. What is he like?

BROTHER MARTIN. He is a small man of mean stature—yet there is something in his eyes—something strange and compelling. They are brown and look right through you. He likes animals too, so you should get on with him.

BROTHER CLEMENT. How do you know he likes animals?

BROTHER MARTIN. He told me as much when he was asking about our St Bernard dogs.

BROTHER CLEMENT. So he wanted to see the dogs, did he?

BROTHER MARTIN. Yes, he made a point of that. Said he had heard all about them.

BROTHER CLEMENT [*regretfully*]. Too bad. Now Brother Joseph will have the pleasure of showing them to him, and I should so much have enjoyed it. Instead of which I must stay indoors over this miserable legend—

BROTHER MARTIN. Only think—he told me he kept a lion!

BROTHER CLEMENT. A what?

BROTHER MARTIN. A lion. I am almost sure he said a lion. Kept it in his house, he said——

BROTHER CLEMENT. Then either he prevaricates or else he is mad.

BROTHER MARTIN. I do not think he is mad, and I am quite sure he is musical. One can generally tell.

BROTHER CLEMENT. I believe that is the first thing you think of when you open the door to a stranger—Can he play? Can he sing?

BROTHER MARTIN. What of it? There is no harm in that. The good God does not regard us as sinners if we like a merry tune—or a sad one either.

BROTHER CLEMENT. I am not so sure of that. To care for anything so much as you care for music does not go to the making of a good religious——

BROTHER MARTIN. Then it may be I am not a good religious. If so it cannot be helped.

BROTHER CLEMENT. You should pray to God——

BROTHER MARTIN. What for? To make me hate music? Not I. That would be a sin, for it would be going against my nature.

BROTHER CLEMENT. All the same——

BROTHER MARTIN [*interrupting*]. Do you pray to God to cure you of your love for animals?

BROTHER CLEMENT [*rising*]. That is different. Animals are God's creatures. Besides, they are of service to man.

BROTHER MARTIN [*growing heated*]. And is music, then, not of service to man? Music that—music—[*he splutters and grows inarticulate*].—Oh, you are hopeless, Brother Clement. I will talk with you no longer lest I lose my temper.

[*Crosses to exit L.*]

BROTHER CLEMENT. You have done that already——

[*BROTHER MARTIN goes out L.*]

[BROTHER CLEMENT resumes his seat at table and begins once more to read.

BROTHER CLEMENT. "... How to trip and sing this minstrel understood but naught beside, for he had conned no other lesson, nor pater noster, nor chant, nor credo, nor ave, nor aught that might make for his salvation——"

[Knock on door R.

BROTHER CLEMENT [looking up]. Who is that ?

[KEAN enters : a man in the thirties, slightly built, short in stature, dark, and with a vividly expressive face. Is dressed for travelling.

KEAN [at door]. I hope I do not intrude ?

BROTHER CLEMENT [rising]. Enter, monsieur——

KEAN [coming in]. I was told this was the way to the Guest Room——

BROTHER CLEMENT. That is quite correct, monsieur. It is here we receive all wayfarers and travellers. Father Ambrose is our Master of the Guests—but I think you have seen him already ?

KEAN. Yes, he has been showing me over your monastery, but he was summoned by your Father Superior, so I told him I would find my own way.

BROTHER CLEMENT. You have come from far, monsieur ?

KEAN. From Geneva.

BROTHER CLEMENT. Can I not offer you some refreshment ? A glass perhaps of our home-made wine ? You must be tired after so long a journey.

[Goes towards cupboard which he opens and selects a bottle.

KEAN [seating himself by table]. I am stiff rather than tired. Ever since daybreak have I been sitting cooped up in that cursed carriage while we climbed—Heavens, how we climbed—I began to pity the poor mules——

BROTHER CLEMENT [taking glass from cupboard, polishing it

with a cloth, and placing it on tray as he talks]. What would monsieur have? There is only one other mountain in the world so high as this one, that is known to be inhabited.

KEAN. Indeed?.

BROTHER CLEMENT [*drawing cork of bottle*]. Monsieur is surprised?

KEAN. More interested than surprised. And do you actually live here all the year round?

BROTHER CLEMENT. Yes, monsieur, I have lived here ever since I was a youth of sixteen. We have to come here young to get acclimatized to the winter months. It is very cold here in the winter.

KEAN. I believe you, and dreary too—utterly desolate, is it not?

BROTHER CLEMENT. We do not find it so. We have too much to do. [*Hands tray with wine on it to KEAN.*]

KEAN [*taking glass*]. Thanks. [*Raising glass*] I drink to your very good health, Brother . . . ? [*Looks questioningly at him.*]

BROTHER CLEMENT. I am Brother Clement, monsieur.

KEAN [*putting down glass, having drunk*]. I hope I did not disturb you, Brother Clement, at your studies. You were reading, were you not, when I came in?

BROTHER CLEMENT. Yes, monsieur. I was reading a legend written by the Holy Fathers of Clairvaux—

[*Indicates book on table.*]

KEAN. That looks to be a very old book.

BROTHER CLEMENT. It is old, monsieur, yes—very old—

KEAN. You are fond of reading?

BROTHER CLEMENT. No, monsieur, I cannot say that I am. Books mean little to me. I like better to be out of doors—hoeing in the garden or tending the beasts. But I am appointed to read this evening in the refectory during our

evening meal, and as I did not want to make too many mistakes——

KEAN. I see. You are having a rehearsal ?

BROTHER CLEMENT. *Pardon ?*

KEAN. You were trying it over, were you not ? Getting used to the sound of your own voice ?

BROTHER CLEMENT. Exactly, monsieur, and to some of the big words that I do not find too easy . . .

[Sound of dogs barking in the distance ; his worried look changes to an expression of delight as he looks up and exclaims.

KEAN. What is that ?

BROTHER CLEMENT. It is the dogs, monsieur !

[Rises and goes towards window.

KEAN *[joining him]*. Aha—the famous St Bernard dogs !

BROTHER CLEMENT. Brother Joseph is bringing them back from their exercise. Usually they are my charge, and indeed they follow me better than any of the other Brethren, for I have trained them ever since they were puppies.

KEAN. Indeed ? Then you are doing an excellent work——

BROTHER CLEMENT. Work ? It is no work. For me *that* is work *[indicates book]* and the dogs—they are play.

KEAN. All the world has heard of these clever beasts of yours and the wonderful feats they have performed in saving human life. I hope I shall have the privilege of seeing them ?

BROTHER CLEMENT *[eagerly]*. Of course, monsieur. I will show them to you myself, later on, when they have been fed and kennelled. See—here they come—*[Barking draws nearer.]* Look, monsieur, that is Barry, that big one there with the medal on his collar——

KEAN *[looking]*. Barry, eh ? Is that his name ?

BROTHER CLEMENT. But of course ! You have not heard

of our famous dog Barry ? Most of our visitors ask especially to see him !

KEAN [*amused and touched*]. I am afraid I am but a raw traveller. This is my first trip abroad. Tell me about Barry ? He looks a fine dog.

BROTHER CLEMENT. He is old—our veteran. But he is a hero ; you would hardly believe the number of lives he has saved. In the great blizzard that we had here five years ago we tried to prevent him from going out, thinking he was past his work. But somehow he escaped, and next morning in he came, carrying a half-dead boy. He must have found him somewhere between the Bridge of Drouaz and the Ice-house of Balsora, though how he got him on to his back none of us ever knew——

KEAN. Brave fellow—noble fellow——

[*Enter another MONK carrying a dog whip.*]

BROTHER CLEMENT. Here comes Brother Joseph.

BROTHER JOSEPH. Good evening, monsieur. Pardon—I was not aware we had a visitor.

BROTHER CLEMENT. Monsieur has just arrived from Geneva. and he is very fond of dogs.

KEAN. I have just been admiring your charges——

BROTHER JOSEPH. Monsieur is perhaps English ?

KEAN. What makes you think so ?

BROTHER JOSEPH. All the English seem fond of dogs——

BROTHER CLEMENT [*as if suddenly remembering something*]. By the way—is it true—Brother Martin told me—and yet I can hardly believe it——

KEAN. Believe what ?

BROTHER CLEMENT. He said you kept a lion.

BROTHER JOSEPH. A lion ?

[*Stares at KEAN*]

KEAN. Quite true, I do keep a lion.

BROTHER CLEMENT. Not—in your home—in your house ?

KEAN. Why not? He is an excellent pet. Besides, a lion is the emblem of England, my native land. I only wish I could keep a unicorn as well.

BROTHER JOSEPH [*tickled*]. Monsieur puts me in mind of the English milord that stayed the night here last summer——

BROTHER CLEMENT. He did not have a lion.

BROTHER JOSEPH. No, but he had a monkey, a couple of hedge-hogs, and three cats!

BROTHER CLEMENT [*laughing*]. Yes and a parrot too!

KEAN [*amused*]. By the gods—Byron! It could be no one else!

BROTHER JOSEPH. *Pardon, monsieur?*

KEAN. Lord Byron—was that not his name?

BROTHER JOSEPH. I cannot recollect. He was on his way, I think, to Venice. Monsieur perhaps knows of him?

KEAN. It would be strange if I did not. He is the most notorious man in Europe.

BROTHER CLEMENT. Oh? And what has he done to be so famous?

KEAN. Er—well, for one thing he has written a lot of poetry.

BROTHER CLEMENT. Poetry?

[*Enter FATHER AMBROSE up R.*]

FATHER AMBROSE. Forgive my delay, monsieur. I hope my good Brethren here have been entertaining you in my absence.

KEAN. Indeed, yes, thank you, Father Ambrose.

BROTHER CLEMENT. Only think, Reverend Father—the English milord who stayed with us last summer—you remember?

FATHER AMBROSE. The one who arrived with so many strange creatures?

BROTHER CLEMENT. Yes—he writes poetry!

KEAN. But you will only remember him for his tame menagerie. [*Ironically amused*] Poor Byron—the Pilgrim of Eternity !

[*Dogs bark outside.*]

BROTHER JOSEPH. The dogs are hungry. I must go and attend to them.

BROTHER CLEMENT. I will come with you. They always like it best when Brother Clement brings them their supper.

[*The two MONKS go off together up R. after first bowing to FATHER AMBROSE.*]

FATHER AMBROSE [*thinking*]. Byron. [*To KEAN*] You said Byron, did you not ? [*KEAN indicates assent.*] I think I remember that name. [*Goes to drawer in table, takes out notebook from which he extracts a sheet of paper.*] He wrote this and left it as a memorial of his visit. You might perhaps like to read it.

[*Hands paper to KEAN.*]

KEAN [*reading*]. . . . above me are the Alps,

The palaces of Nature, whose vast walls

Have pinnaced in clouds their snowy scalps,

And throned Eternity in icy halls

Of cold sublimity, where forms and falls

The avalanche—the thunderbolt of snow !

All that expands the spirit, yet appals,

Gathers around these summits as to show

How Earth may pierce to Heaven yet leave

vain man below.

FATHER AMBROSE [*after slight pause*]. You see, he has signed it—Byron—

KEAN. So I see. One day this piece of paper will be a collector's treasure.

FATHER AMBROSE. The truth is, we are so far removed here from the haunts of humanity that names and reputations

mean very little to us. We are what you would call extremely ignorant men.

KEAN [*with assumed casualness*]. Ever heard the name of Edmund Kean ?

FATHER AMBROSE. Never, monsieur, though from the tone of your voice I should imagine he too must be a celebrity.

KEAN. He is the idol of London.

FATHER AMBROSE. Also a poet ?

KEAN. No. But he is the poet's very good friend.

FATHER AMBROSE. And a friend of yours, I think, too, monsieur. No ?

KEAN. Hm. I should prefer to call him my enemy. Yet I am sorry for the poor wretch.

FATHER AMBROSE. He is unhappy ?

KEAN. He is haunted.

FATHER AMBROSE. By what is he haunted ?

KEAN. By ghosts of the past : spectres of the future. He is beginning to detest his profession.

FATHER AMBROSE. What is his profession ?

KEAN. He is an actor.

FATHER AMBROSE. Ah ?

KEAN. Imagine to yourself a man possessed by a demon—a demon that will not let him rest—the urge to express himself. For years he is neglected—starving—hopeless—striving against the most terrible odds. Suddenly something happens—something stupendous. As by a miracle his life is changed—changed more in a few months than most men's lives can alter in a period of years. He is rich ; he is sought after. Fortune hands him her cup with a smile ; he drinks the sweet potion of gratified ambition, only to find there is death in the pot.

FATHER AMBROSE. That is a familiar story.

KEAN. Possibly. But that is small comfort to him.

FATHER AMBROSE. You mean—do you not—to yourself, my son ?

KEAN. Aha ! So my simple ruse has been detected ?

FATHER AMBROSE. It is a well-worn ruse. So many men use it when they wish to make a confidence. Perhaps you will find peace, my son, now you have come to visit our monastery. It has happened like that many times before.

KEAN. I fear it will not happen to me. I am as one who
 . . . grown aged in this world of woe

In deeds, not years, piercing the depths of life,

So that no wonder waits him ; nor below

Can love or sorrow, fame, ambition, strife,

Cut to his heart again with the keen knife

Of silent, sharp endurance ; he can tell

Why thoughts seek refuge in lone caves, yet rife

With airy images, and shapes which dwell

Still unimpaired, though old, in the soul's haunted cell.

'Tis to create, and in creating live

A being more intense, that we endow

With forms our fancy, gaining as we give

The life we image, even as I do now.

What am I ? Nothing—

[*He breaks off abruptly.*]

Pah ! I weary you, Father. Like Hamlet I unpack my heart with words.

FATHER AMBROSE. They are bitter words, my son.

KEAN. They are Byron's words. His fate resembles mine. Both of us achieved fame overnight. But he did not, as I did, have to wade through blood and tears before achieving his kingdom.

[*A knock on door up R.*]

FATHER AMBROSE. Come in.

[*Door opens to reveal BROTHER MARTIN.*]

BROTHER MARTIN. By your leave, Reverend Father, the Father Superior requests your presence——

FATHER AMBROSE [*going towards door*]. Thanks, Brother Martin, I will come.

BROTHER MARTIN. The visitor's dinner is prepared. Shall I bring it in now, Reverend Father?

FATHER AMBROSE. Yes. . . . [BROTHER MARTIN *exit* and FATHER AMBROSE *turns to* KEAN] After your meal, monsieur, I shall hope for another chat. Meanwhile—peace be with you.

[KEAN *bows*. FATHER AMBROSE *goes off R*.
[KEAN, *left alone*, goes towards table and idly turns over leaves of book. Something arrests his attention and he begins to read. Enter BROTHER CLEMENT L.

BROTHER CLEMENT. Excuse me, monsieur—[*going to table*] The book—— [*about to take it up*].

KEAN. Yes?

BROTHER CLEMENT. I have to take it to the refectory in readiness for supper. Perhaps later, if you are interested, you may care to look at it again?

KEAN [*pointing to page with marker in it*]. What is this Legend all about?

BROTHER CLEMENT. It is called *My Lady's Tumbler*, monsieur.

KEAN. Tumbler, eh? You mean an acrobat—a stroller?

BROTHER CLEMENT. Something of that kind, monsieur. We have them here sometimes seeking shelter on their way to the towns. They are always poor men in need of a meal, but this one, it seems, was rich. The chronicler tells us he had horses and robes and money, all of which he gave up when he entered a Holy Order.

KEAN. What? He became a monk?

BROTHER CLEMENT. Yes, monsieur, a religious. He was weary of wandering, so he took leave of the world and resolved never again to set foot in it.

KEAN. And regretted it ever after, eh ?

BROTHER CLEMENT. No indeed, he had no reason to regret it. You see, monsieur, a very wonderful thing happened.

KEAN. What was that ?

BROTHER CLEMENT. No sooner was he in distress than the Holy Virgin herself came to his aid.

KEAN. The Holy Virgin ? Heigh-ho—I wish she would come to mine.

BROTHER CLEMENT [*with great simplicity*]. Perhaps monsieur has not asked her ?

KEAN. I cannot say that I have.

BROTHER CLEMENT. That is a pity. But it is never too late.

[*He picks up book and takes it off with him up R. Before going off he stands aside a moment to give entrance to BROTHER MARTIN, who comes in carrying a meal on a tray. This he puts on table, placing a chair for KEAN and putting a bottle of wine on table.*]

BROTHER MARTIN [*to KEAN, who is standing at window back to audience*]. There, monsieur ; your dinner. Shall I pour you out a glass of wine ?

KEAN. Thanks.

BROTHER MARTIN [*pouring wine into glass*]. Might I ask monsieur a question ?

KEAN. Yes ?

BROTHER MARTIN. Do you sing, monsieur ? Or play, perhaps ?

KEAN. I do both, after a fashion. You are fond of music ?

BROTHER MARTIN. Ah, monsieur, it is the pleasure of my life. But living here as we do, we enjoy so little of it. [*Crosses to spinet.*] See, we have here this old instrument. It has seen its best days, but some of the notes are in tune. Listen. [*Plays a note or two.*] That is how it is, monsieur. Do you find it too bad ?

KEAN. I've played on worse. Many and many a time.

BROTHER MARTIN. Then after you have supped we could perhaps have a little concert—yes?

KEAN. I'll do what I can to amuse you

BROTHER MARTIN [*glowing*]. I knew I was right! I can almost always tell when I open the door to visitors what kind of a man is asking for a night's lodging.

KEAN. So you are a reader of character?

BROTHER MARTIN. It is the look in their eyes that tells me.

KEAN. And in mine you saw music?

BROTHER MARTIN. Yes, monsieur, music and—and hunger—

KEAN. Hunger? [*He says the word poignantly, and then immediately changes his tone as he approaches table.*] You have brought me the cure for that. [*Seats himself.*

BROTHER MARTIN [*removing cover from dish*]. Tripe and onions, monsieur.

KEAN. Ha! [*He raises his glass grandiloquently with a histrionic gesture*] Here's to . . .

[*Catching BROTHER MARTIN's eye expectantly fixed on him, he impishly deflates his anticipation of something impressive in the nature of a toast.*

. . . tripe and onions!

[*He tosses off wine with BROTHER MARTIN looking up at him, puzzled.*

CURTAIN

The curtain is only lowered for a moment to denote the passage of time. When it is raised again the dinner-things have been cleared away—all except the wine, which is left on the table.

KEAN is seated at the piano and listening to him are BROTHERS MARTIN, CLEMENT, and JOSEPH. He is singing an old ballad.

KEAN. Then the boy swam round, and came to the port side,
And he looked up at his messmates, and bitterly he cried :
" O messmates, take me up, for I'm drifting with the tide,
And I'm sinking in the Lowland, Lowland,
I'm sinking in the Lowland sea."

Then his messmates drew him up, but on the deck he died ;
And they sewed him in his hammock that was so large
and wide ;
And they lowered him overboard—but he drifted with the
tide—
And he sank beneath the Lowland, Lowland,
He sank beneath the Lowland sea.

[*He finishes the accompanying refrain on piano.*]

BROTHER JOSEPH. What is the name of that ballad, monsieur ?

KEAN. It is called *The Golden Vanity*. Years ago I would sing it of a night time to the sailors when I was a ship's boy.

BROTHER CLEMENT. You have been a sailor, then ?

KEAN. "When I was a lad I ran away to sea, but I liked it so little I ran back again. Well ? Shall we have another ? Or are you weary of me ?

BROTHER MARTIN. Indeed we are not. We have only been here one hour.

KEAN [*amused*]. Brother Martin, I fear me you are something of a glutton. However—

[*He plays the refrain of one of Moore's Irish Melodies and starts singing to it.*]

KEAN. How dear to me the hour when daylight dies
And sunbeams melt along the silent sea ;
For then sweet dreams of other days arise

And Memory breathes her vesper sigh to thee.
And as I watch the line of light that plays
Along the smooth wave toward the burning West,
I long to tread that golden path of rays
And think 'twould lead to some bright isle of rest
[Turns to them] Is that to your liking?

BROTHER MARTIN. Indeed, yes, monsieur. Only I could wish that the piano were more worthy of your singing.

KEAN. Do not blame the piano. We are both in the conspiracy, being like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh.

BROTHER MARTIN. That is a beautiful melody. But so sad, is it not?

BROTHER CLEMENT. And monsieur sings it as if from the heart.

KEAN. How else would you have me sing it? It was written to pierce the souls of the unwary and old Tom Moore knows his business. Often has that plaintive ditty assisted me to line my stomach.

BROTHER JOSEPH. Line your stomach?

KEAN. Have I not warbled it to the desiccated virgins of every cathedral city in England? Bless their sentimental hearts, and the pence they bestowed on me. But sing it not to the tradesfolk and pot-bellied hucksters. They're all for a ballad and a catch highly-seasoned.

BROTHER CLEMENT. I do not understand.

BROTHER MARTIN [*perplexed*]. Of what is he talking?

KEAN [*strumming softly and speaking as if to himself*]. Pictures—memories—how the jingle-jangle of a few old wires can serve to resuscitate ghosts!

BROTHER CLEMENT. Ghosts, monsieur? What ghosts?

KEAN [*still speaking through music*]. Hope—despair—ambition—stables—inn-yards—bar-parlours—driving rain—mer-

ciless sun—endless roads . . . A man and his wife trudging—he carries his child pick-a-back . . . First one town then another . . . “Show your skill now, Master Player, for the night will soon be upon you, your wife is starving, your child ‘clemmed with cold, and you yourself upheld only by the demon within you . . .”

[*He plays a succession of chords softly, while the perplexed MONKS talk among themselves.*]

BROTHER JOSEPH. Did you hear that? He said ‘demon!’

BROTHER MARTIN. What did he mean by it?

BROTHER CLEMENT. He is crazed. I said as much when you told me about the lion . . .

BROTHER MARTIN. It was he told me.

BROTHER CLEMENT. He told me too, but that does not make him sane.

BROTHER JOSEPH. Ssh—he can hear what we say.

KEAN [*continuing playing*]. Fool ‘em—fool ‘em to the top of their bent! Bewitch them with all the wizardry at your command . . . “Hey, Master Inn-keeper, can you take us in for the night? We are worn out . . .”

“Worn out, are you? Let’s first see the colour of your money—I don’t trust mumping folk.”

Money—always money—

“I tell you, Master Inn-keeper, I must get to the next town . . . There’s a theatre there . . . They may want actors.”

“Well, I’m not stopping you, am I?”

“But we must have a lodging for the night—a roof to our heads.”

“There’s a barn in the yard; you can sleep there, the three of you.”

“God bless you, Inn-keeper.”

“Ah, but you’ll have to make it worth my while.”

"But I tell you I've no money—not a farthing. We've had bad luck—the company——"

"I can't help that. That's your trouble."

"Wait! Is there anything here I can play? Anything that makes music?"

"Aye, you'll find an old piano in the barn——"

"Then I'll sing for my supper. Let the yokels pay for it. Come, wife—come, son Howard——"

[He breaks into a spirited air.]

Robin he married a wife in the West,
Moppety, moppety, mono ;
And she turned out to be none of the best,
With a high jig-jiggety, tops and petticoats,
Robin-a-Thrush cries mono——

Walk in, walk in, ladies and gents—here's a real live mummer awaiting your commands. Pay your money and take your choice—Harlequin, Tom Tug, the Dying Chimpanzee—what will you? Say the word and he'll tumble at your bidding, dance on the tight-rope, spar with you, fence with you, spout tragedy—sing with you—Only walk up, walk up . . .

[He plays again and sings.]

Of all the horses in the merry greenwood
The bobtailed mare bears the bells away ;
There is Hey, there is Ree, there is Hoo, there is Gee,
But the bobtailed mare bears the bells away——

They are coming—the fat-heads are coming—the yokels are coming——

BROTHER CLEMENT *[speaking through refrain]*. What is it you play now, monsieur?

KEAN. Springes to catch woodcocks. They are trooping

into the barn, the Butcher, the Baker, the Candlestick Maker—

"Hi there, Landlord, bring beer, bring baccy, snuff, the candles! Here's custom!"

What shall it be? *Pudding in a Lantern?* Nay, 'tis too hot for pudding—*The Lover's Lament?* Nay, 'tis too hot for love-making. You're for a racy tale or a jig or else you sleep. I'll give you *Margery Topping*. And you, son Howard, go round with the hat and don't forget to make your prettiest bow. [*He imitates a child's voice*] "I won't forget, Father. They always like *Margery Topping*. I think we shall have some supper to-night."

[*He ends abruptly with a crash of chords and a groan.*]

BROTHER CLEMENT. Monsieur? What is it? Are you ill?

KEAN [*rising to his feet and speaking with bravado*]. Ill? Who said I was ill?

BROTHER MARTIN. But you have stopped playing.

KEAN [*glaring at him*]. What if I have? It will not be for the first time. [*He proclaims in a loud voice*] "Ladies and gentlemen . . . I regret to inform you Mr Kean is indisposed . . ."

[*He sways suddenly as if about to fall: they go to his assistance, leading him to chair where he sits.*]

[*Door opens up R. and FATHER AMBROSE enters.*]

FATHER AMBROSE. What is this? [*Comes down.*]

[*The MONKS chatter simultaneously "We do not know, Reverend Father—" "He began to play and then suddenly—" "Do you think he is possessed?" "Yes—he talks of a demon—"*]

FATHER AMBROSE. Leave me with him alone.

[*The MONKS obediently withdraw up R. FATHER AMBROSE pours out a glass of wine and brings it to KEAN.*]

FATHER AMBROSE. Drink this. It will soothe you.

KEAN [*taking glass*]. Wine, eh ?

FATHER AMBROSE. Drink. It will do you good.

KEAN [*having drunk*]. Thanks, Father. [*Puts glass down*]
I suppose you think I am mad ?

FATHER AMBROSE. I think you are unused to our rarefied mountain air. Frequently it has been known to excite those unaccustomed——

KEAN [*cutting in impatiently*]. It is not your mountain air that excites. It is these cursed old melodies that raise the dead to life.

FATHER AMBROSE. The dead ?

KEAN. I heard his childish voice, and saw as it had been yesterday his gallant little figure handing round the hat for pennies—[*with emotion as he cries out*] Howard !

FATHER AMBROSE [*divining*]. Your child ?

KEAN. My firstborn. He was gifted. He was beautiful.

FATHER AMBROSE [*gently*]. He is dead ? [KEAN *turns away : pause.*] May God rest his soul, for he is now with the angels of Heaven.

KEAN. I know it. He is the fortunate one—my child—my sweet boy ! [*Facing him*] But tell me this—you who are a religious man—Was it not hard, aye, hard beyond bearing, that that little lad, my firstborn, who had borne with me, babe though he was, the burden and heat of the day, should have been snatched from me the very night my luck turned ? For turn it did. We were at Dorchester. I could scarcely play for thinking of my sick boy, and the house so poor it would barely cover the cost of our supper. Two strangers, unknown to me, were in front. They had seen me perform. My hour had struck ! A few weeks later and I was making history in the heart of theatrical London. But Howard—was dead.

FATHER AMBROSE. You have no other children to console you ?

KEAN. I have my little Charles ; a lively brat of six. He plays in his nursery with golden guineas presented to him by society belles who toy with his curls and proclaim him to be the image of his interesting papa. Papa is London's pet—Papa is the fashion ! Not to have seen Kean as Shylock, as Hamlet, as Lear—why, you are a mere barbarian. Run then and congratulate the Great Little Man on his superb performance ; join your coach to the crowd that is already blocking the street he inhabits. [*With concentrated bitterness*] They know no more of Shakespeare than do your St Bernard dogs ; the dogs at least would succour me were I in jeopardy, but these Londoners—not one of them would have troubled to glance four years ago at the starving player who bore my name. Faugh—I am sick of it !

[*He drops wearily into chair and sits despondently, head in hands.*]

[FATHER AMBROSE, *pacing the room, looks at him with compassion and speaks after a short pause.*]

FATHER AMBROSE. "God, Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee . . ."

KEAN [*looking up*]. Whose words are those ?

FATHER AMBROSE. They were uttered by Saint Augustine. And bitterly he proved the truth of them.

KEAN. He was more fortunate than I shall be.

FATHER AMBROSE. Who are you, my son, to say that ?

KEAN. Who am I ? I am Edmund Kean the mummer. Ask the tawdry firework that shoots across the sky to the plaudits of the mob what it knows of the secrets of repose. So is my passage—as sterile and as fugitive. My actor's life is based on artifice and make-believe. How to escape to reality ? I am surrounded by the Fashionable World ; it

stifles me with its shoddy pretence. Low life is better than no life. So all too frequently I am discovered in the most squalid of London taverns, drunk and in my cups. My audience awaits me : " Mr Kean is unable to appear." It is my gesture—my impotent effort to assert my values against theirs. I sail in a boat on the Thames with my tame lion as my sole passenger ; all eyes are fixed on Kean, the Erratic Tragedian. They say I do it for advertisement, but it goes deeper than that. In short, I bid fair to become the Complete Eccentric.

[He stops abruptly and through the ensuing pause bells can be heard to ring.]

KEAN. Bells . . . *[He goes to window, looks out, then turns back and speaks more quietly]* They calm the soul. *[The bells continue and he turns to FATHER AMBROSE.]* Why do they ring ? Is it for service ?

FATHER AMBROSE. They are calling the Brethren to their evening meal in the refectory next door.

[Pause ; bells continue a moment or so ; then cease.]

KEAN *[who has by now mastered his emotion]*. It is peaceful up here.

FATHER AMBROSE. I have already told you, my son, that many men have found peace within this monastery.

KEAN. Would that I might be one of them.

[The monks, now assembled next door, are heard intoning a Latin grace.]

KEAN. What are they singing ?

FATHER AMBROSE. Their grace.

[Voices cease, to be followed by the sound of one man's voice reading aloud.]

KEAN. That is Brother Clement's voice, is it not ?

FATHER AMBROSE. He is reading from the legend appointed for to-day. *[The words strike a thought in his mind and he*

repeats them in a fashion to convey as much.] The legend appointed for to-day ! [*Goes up R. and opens door wide.*] I think we will listen to that legend.

[*He beckons KEAN to his side and together they listen to the voice that is loud and distinct.*

BROTHER CLEMENT [*reading*]. "... Soon after he had entered the Convent the Minstrel was sore of heart saying 'O wretched me, what am I doing? For all men within these walls are busied with the service of God and only I know no prayer nor aught that is good.' Thus maddened with grief he went his way till he came upon a crypt and above the altar was the form of My Lady the Holy Mary. He had not lost his way when he came to that place; no verily, for God, who well knows how to call His own to Him, led him there. For suddenly he was as one who knew what to do and began performing before her all his finest feats saying 'Now will I serve God and His Mother according to my trade.' Thus saying he tumbled and leapt. And Holy Mary smiled upon him and refreshed him when he was weary. So went it with the good man a long space of years, and at his death there was joy in Heaven that God would no longer hide His love for His batchelor. This is what the holy fathers relate concerning this minstrel. In happy hour he tumbled, in happy hour he served. Now pray we to God who has no like that He grant us so to serve Him that we may earn His love."

[*FATHER AMBROSE closes door and turns to KEAN.*

FATHER AMBROSE. Are you comforted, my son ?

KEAN. What would you have me do? Exchange my grease-paint for a cowl? Renounce my calling?

FATHER AMBROSE. Nay, I would have you rather practise it. But with a reaching-out toward all men and compassion in your heart.

KEAN. Compassion ?

FATHER AMBROSE. For your fellow-players. For truly the world is itself but a theatre where each must play his part in accordance with God's will.

KEAN. Ha ! So you know your Shakespeare ?

FATHER AMBROSE [*shakes head*]. I am acquainted with human nature.

KEAN. . . . All the world's a stage

And all the men and women merely players . . .

[*He stands a moment thinking; he seems about to say something but changes his mind, and turns abruptly towards the window which he now opens and looks out.*]

KEAN. The moon is rising. What an evening ! [*Moves away from window.*] I think I will go for a stroll.

FATHER AMBROSE. Do. It will do you good.

KEAN. On my way I will think of all you have said to me. [*In lighter vein*] Perhaps I will visit the dog Barry, whose business is salvation. It may be he will give me some hints concerning the good life . . .

FATHER AMBROSE [*responding to his mood*]. One might do worse . . .

[*FATHER AMBROSE crosses to door down L. which he opens for KEAN to pass through. As KEAN goes out FATHER AMBROSE raises his hand in benediction.*]

FATHER AMBROSE. May the Lord go with you now and always.

[*KEAN exit. FATHER AMBROSE shuts door, walks slowly towards window and stands looking out.*]

CURTAIN

ACTING NOTES AND EXERCISES

PLAYS are written to be acted and it is only fair to the authors that every attempt should be made to obtain as finished a production as possible.

Many a well-acted play has been ruined by a makeshift stage for which, in most cases, there is little or no excuse. Too often this side of production has been left to look after itself, as though, by some miracle, the dingy trappings and creaking boards will be transformed "on the night" into "the king's Palace" by the mere switching on of a naked 100-watt lamp. Indeed, some producers have even gone out of their way to present plays in barns and cellars (with cobwebs intact) fondly imagining that such surroundings add "something" to the drama.

Affectation is not acting. Each part needs careful and honest study so that you are certain you know the *qualities* of character you are to portray. Once you have a clear picture in your mind's eye of the character—you *must* try to visualize the character—then you can begin to add the significant little gestures peculiar to such a person, and those modulations of voice, and variations in pace, which will begin to make you an actor and not just a person reciting a part.

THE UGLY DUCKLING

THIS is "make-believe"—a burlesque of the conventional fairy story. It should be acted at a lively pace and will be the more amusing if the gestures of all the characters, except the Prince and the Princess, are exaggerated to some extent. Pay particular attention to the dialogue—unless it is very carefully pointed, much of Mr Milne's delightful humour will be missed. A pause here, a variation in pace or tone there, will work wonders.

EXERCISES

1. Do you consider this play is as exaggerated as *Alice in Wonderland*? Illustrate your answer.

2. The King says, on one occasion, "You are sitting there thinking beautiful thoughts—in maiden meditation, fancy-free"; and on another, "Softly, and giving the words a dying fall." Do you recognize any of this phraseology?

3. What is meant by 'a conventional story'? Is there anything conventional about this play?

4. How does the humour in this play differ from that in *The Doctor from Dunmore*?

5. If you were asked to act the part of the Chancellor, name the qualities of character you would stress.

6. Do you think this play would be suitable for a Walt Disney film? Give a reason for your answer.

7. Is the author poking fun at anything modern?

8. Do you think the addition of an evil character, e.g. a wicked witch, would have strengthened the plot?

9. Why is it that the Prince and the Princess appeal to us at once?

10. Grimm's Fairy Stories and those of Hans Andersen are usually sad or even tragic. Can you suggest a reason for this?

THE REAL ST GEORGE

THIS is tragedy—and what a magnificent one it is, thrown, as it were, into bold relief by the amusing and contrasting Prologue.

Great care must be taken not to over-act it, especially the part of Diocletian, which could easily be turned into "a part to tear a cat in." Restraint is imperative to make tragedy convincing.

EXERCISES

1. The setting of the Prologue is mediæval, and that of the main play A.D. 287–304, yet the dialogue is modern. Would it have made any difference to the play if the author had tried to flavour the dialogue to suit those ages?

2. Scene I shows us that certain fundamental things do not change with the passage of time. What are those things?

3. If you were asked to act the part of George, name the qualities of character you would stress.

4. If you were going to act the part of the Emperor Diocletian,

what would you try to avoid doing in order to make your performance convincing? Give reasons for your decisions.

5. Which part of Scene III do you consider the most moving? Give a reason.

6. What is the main function of Claudius and Valerius in Scene II?

7. Name the play in this collection which you think most resembles *The Real St George*. Give a reason for your choice.

8. In what way does this play resemble Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*?

9. The stroke of the bell signifying George's death would have made an excellent final 'curtain.' Why didn't the author end the play at that point?

10. Shakespeare, at the peak of his career, wrote tragedy. Can you suggest a reason for this, explaining why he did not write this type of play at first?

THE QUEEN AND MR SHAKESPEARE

IT is always interesting to imagine what might have happened between famous people—the newspapers attempt it almost every day—giving imaginary accounts of the happenings at famous meetings between dictators—or between Mr Churchill and Mr Stalin. They satisfy our innate love of drama.

This little meeting is no exception and makes an amusing and charming play. Be careful to keep the acting quite natural or the production will become stilted, and pay particular attention to movement. Some very attractive sweeps can be made with the full dresses of that day—and very significant they can be, too.

EXERCISES

1. The title of the play is arresting. Why?

2. "Beginners always act better in costume." Is this true? Give reasons for your decision.

3. Shakespeare says to Simon, "Be polite, they may be patrons." To whom is he alluding?

4. If you were asked to act the part of Sir Robert Cecil, state the qualities of character you would stress.

5. The setting of the play is the XVIIth century. The dialogue is almost entirely modern. Do you think dialogue and setting clash? Give a reason for your answer.

6. Shakespeare is recognized as the greatest of the dramatists. Why should he have been concerned about Ben Jonson's being asked to write a play for the Queen?

7. Is there anything in this play to show the attitude of the ruling classes in Shakespeare's time towards actors and playwrights?

8. Sickness is the subject of humour in this play. Why do we laugh at and not pity Sir Robert Cecil in his distress after smoking?

9. What point does the author wish to emphasize when he makes the Queen misquote the lines of poetry Shakespeare has been composing?

10. What is the main difference between this comedy and *The Age of Leisure*?

THE DOCTOR FROM DUNMORE

THIS Irish comedy—from America—shows a great understanding of human nature with its blend of humour and pathos. The characters are very real—and the play has a warm glow about it. This deftness in the handling of character is seen in all the good American films, while we often find in our English films little exaggerations that result in caricatures. To make the people in this play convincing, the acting requires "depth," which can only come from a careful study of each character, so that the small, subtle points can be emphasized, rather than broad, general ones. Too much emphasis on the latter invariably leads to over-acting.

EXERCISES

1. Why do you think the play opens on a tragic note?
2. When do you suspect that the play is, after all, a comedy?
3. What is the difference between the humour in this play and that in *The Age of Leisure*?
4. If you were asked to play the part of the Doctor, name the qualities of character you would stress.
5. Why is it necessary to make the Doctor refuse the cup of poteen?
6. The humour is typically Irish. Does humour really differ in the various countries? Illustrate your answer.
7. What else, besides the characters, adds realism to the play?

8. A good dramatist never draws a wholly bad, or wholly good character. We all of us have our good points—and our little weaknesses. Has the Doctor any redeeming feature?

9. Where do you think the climax of the play comes?

10. What is the point of making *all* the characters strike the bell at the end?

THE SAGE OF CHELSEA

THESE vivid episodes in the life of Thomas Carlyle create a very real picture of that great man. We feel, at the end, that we *know* him. That is a rare achievement on the part of the playwright.

Follow the author's advice and use a simple curtain setting for its production, or the continuity of the play will be broken. The acting must be restrained and needs a very delicate touch.

EXERCISES

1. What is the chief lesson you learn about success from this play?
2. What method did Shakespeare sometimes employ to link his scenes together when his play covered a long period of time? Did he originate the idea? Is a similar method ever employed by playwrights to-day?
3. If you were asked to act the part of Thomas Carlyle, name the qualities of character you would stress.
4. Why do you think the author, at the very beginning of the play, shows us that James Carlyle has been fighting?
5. Why was Edward Irving sceptical of Carlyle's being famous and happy?
6. Do you think Scene III would have suffered in any way if Mrs Taylor had not actually appeared, but had only been referred to? Give a reason for your decision.
7. Disraeli says to Carlyle, "You say what you think." Is that true of Carlyle throughout the play? Illustrate your answer.
8. Which other play in this collection do you think *The Sage of Chelsea* is most like? Give a reason for your choice.
9. Amongst all these famous people why do you think the playwright introduces Carlyle's landlady?
10. What prevents Scene IV from becoming mawkish?

THE AGE OF LEISURE

THIS is satire ; the author is holding up to ridicule and shooting his barbed arrows at "the golden age" we are anticipating after the war.

The problem of leisure is, of course, a very real one and will have to be tackled boldly, or we may find ourselves, one day, like Muggs—bored to death.

The play needs a good modern or futuristic setting and slick production to represent the smooth yet soulless efficiency that science has brought about—there is no time for subtle characterization ; these characters represent types rather than individuals.

EXERCISES

1. Do you think this play would be more difficult to act than *The Doctor from Dunmore* ? Illustrate your answer.
2. What is satire ? Illustrate your answer from this play.
3. Why do you think Muggs revolted against culture ? Can you suggest a remedy ?
4. There will probably always be some hard and dirty work to do—coal-mining, for instance. Do you think that with the advance of science and education it will be difficult to get labour for such work ? Give a reason for your answer.
5. In an advanced society, as visualized in this play, what important thing is ignored ?
6. What do you think, apart from wars, might prevent the world from reaching such an advanced stage ?
7. Karel Capek, the late Czech dramatist, visualized in his play, *R.U.R.*, a world in which all work is done by robots—mechanical men. Do you think we are approaching a robot age and, if so, is it desirable ? Give reasons for your answer.
8. "In an ideal state, the dustman should be paid the same as the doctor." Do you agree with this statement ?
9. Do you think the present Youth Movement is meeting with any success ? Give illustrations. Name any weaknesses and suggest what might be done to strengthen the Movement.
10. "Cinema-going has made us a nation of idlers and gazers."

Do you agree with this statement? Do you think, after the war, it would be a good idea to close down all cinemas except for educational purposes?

“WANTED—MR STUART”

THIS is a highly dramatic play. Note the skill with which the tension is sustained. The author has a fine sense of the theatre and shows admirable restraint, never once allowing a melodramatic touch to mar his scene. In acting the play, it is essential to bear this point in mind—there must be absolute economy of gesture; be careful, however, not to make the play static.

EXERCISES

1. The dialogue throughout is crisp. What effect does this have on the play?
2. What other method has the author employed to make his dialogue effective?
3. If you were asked to act the part of Sir Edgar Harcourt, name the qualities of character you would stress.
4. Do you think any line in this play would provoke an audience to laughter? Name the line and give a reason for your choice.
5. What is the point of the pauses throughout the play?
6. In a dramatic play of this kind, do you think it would have been more effective if the author had allowed Harcourt to fight Maunsell when the latter suggested that Charles was a gay prince, and hoped he was alive to keep the Roundheads on their mettle? Give a reason for your answer.
7. What is there significant about each of Robert's entrances? Illustrate your answer.
8. As an inn would be one of the first places to be searched in a hunt for a fugitive, why do you think the author chose such a place for the setting of his play?
9. The play has an excellent 'curtain.' How has the author achieved this?
10. In serious drama you often find comic relief, as in *Macbeth* for instance. What would have been the effect if a comic character, had been introduced into this play?

THE HEROIC MOULD

ANOTHER comedy, with an impressionistic touch—a method used to stress a broad outline of character or theme, so that all the subtleties of characterization are swept aside in order to give a *general* impression ; so in the scene which shows how Mr Wills' mind is working, the pace of the acting should be increased and the gestures should be more exaggerated. The mere switching on of a red 'spot' or 'flood' would not be sufficient to show the contrast between the real and imaginary scene and thus the point the playwright wishes to emphasize would be missed.

EXERCISES

1. Mrs Hushett is not the conventional type of charwoman met with in plays. How does she differ from that type ?
2. What is it that prompts Mr Wills to behave as he does towards his employer ?
3. Do you think Mr Wills would have been in the position he imagines, if he had been living in Russia ? Give a reason.
4. Name the qualities you would try to stress if you were asked to act the part of Miss Lennart.
5. If you were an employer, which of the characters would you choose to work for you ? Give a reason for your choice.
6. If you were a producer, what advice would you give to the person you had chosen to play the part of Mr Wills ?
7. What is wrong with Mr Wills' statement, "Everyone will receive five pounds per week" ? Give a reason for your answer.
8. Show how this play is like *The Age of Leisure* and wherein it differs.
9. Compare the 'curtain' of this play with that of "*Wanted—Mr Stuart.*" Why do you think the author has ended on a quiet note ?
10. Why is it necessary, at the end, that Miss Lennart's christian name should be Alice and not Astra ?

THE SHIRT

THIS fantastic and satirical comedy is a producer's play—that is to say, there is ample scope for a producer to use his imagination and add such touches, grotesque and humorous, to costume, make-up, movement, speech, lighting, and décor, as he thinks fit ; and the success of the production will rest almost entirely upon his interpretation—much more so than in a play which relies upon subtle acting.

It must be played at a lively pace with the minimum of time for the changes of scene ; and particular attention must be paid to detail, however small, for much of the humour will depend upon visual effect.

EXERCISES

1. Illustrate what you mean by satire by reference to the Court Physicians and the Master of the Royal Hunt.

2. Name any satire in English literature you have read or heard about and explain, in general terms, the aims of the author.

3. Explain briefly any difference you can find between this play and *The Age of Leisure*.

4. Do you think this play would be suitable for presentation by Walt Disney, the creator of Mickey Mouse ? Give reasons for your decision.

5. In acting any of these characters, name the things on which you would have to concentrate.

6. "The more money a man has, the happier he is." Explain the fallacy in this statement.

7. The Court Physician says that "man has four humours." What does this mean ?

8. The Poet pours scorn on the type of entertainment Buckram presents to the public, and adds, "Poor people !" Do you think the public really needs sympathy or is this the kind of entertainment it wants ?

9. Explain why it is that, at the end of the play, the King laughs, showing, in your answer, how this incident differs from the other things the King was supposed to laugh at.

10. "Nine people out of ten prefer 'the pictures' to pictures." How do you think public taste could be improved ?

MONKS AND A MUMMER

IN a serious play of this type, which depends largely upon the acting of one character, great care must be taken to maintain the balance between the quiet, well-ordered, and remote life of the monastery and the histrionics of Edmund Kean. The contrast is extreme and too much emphasis either way will create an artificial atmosphere, because the lives of none of these people are normal in the ordinary sense of the word.

EXERCISES

1. The setting is a monastery. Why do you think the play opens with a slight discord between the two Brothers? Would it not have been better if there had been complete harmony?
2. Why do you think it is necessary to give the audience a clear picture of Edmund Kean before he comes on the stage?
3. Would the play have suffered in any way if all reference to Byron had been omitted? Give a reason for your decision.
4. After Kean had become famous, do you think it was necessary for him to behave as he did? Give reasons for your decision.
5. A good Shakespearian production will still attract enthusiastic audiences. How is it that Shakespeare is able to compete with modern playwrights?
6. What do you consider is wrong with the Repertory Theatre movement of to-day? Suggest remedies.
7. There has been a good deal of talk about a National Theatre—to be built in London. Do you think such a theatre would restore life and vitality to the serious drama? In your answer make alternative suggestions.
8. Can you suggest any ways for the raising of the standard of amateur productions as a whole?
9. Can you suggest why it is that good stage actors often make poor film actors?
10. "Acting before the microphone is much easier than appearing on the stage because you are not seen." Discuss this statement.

